UNDER THE LONE STAR

BY HERBERT HAYENS

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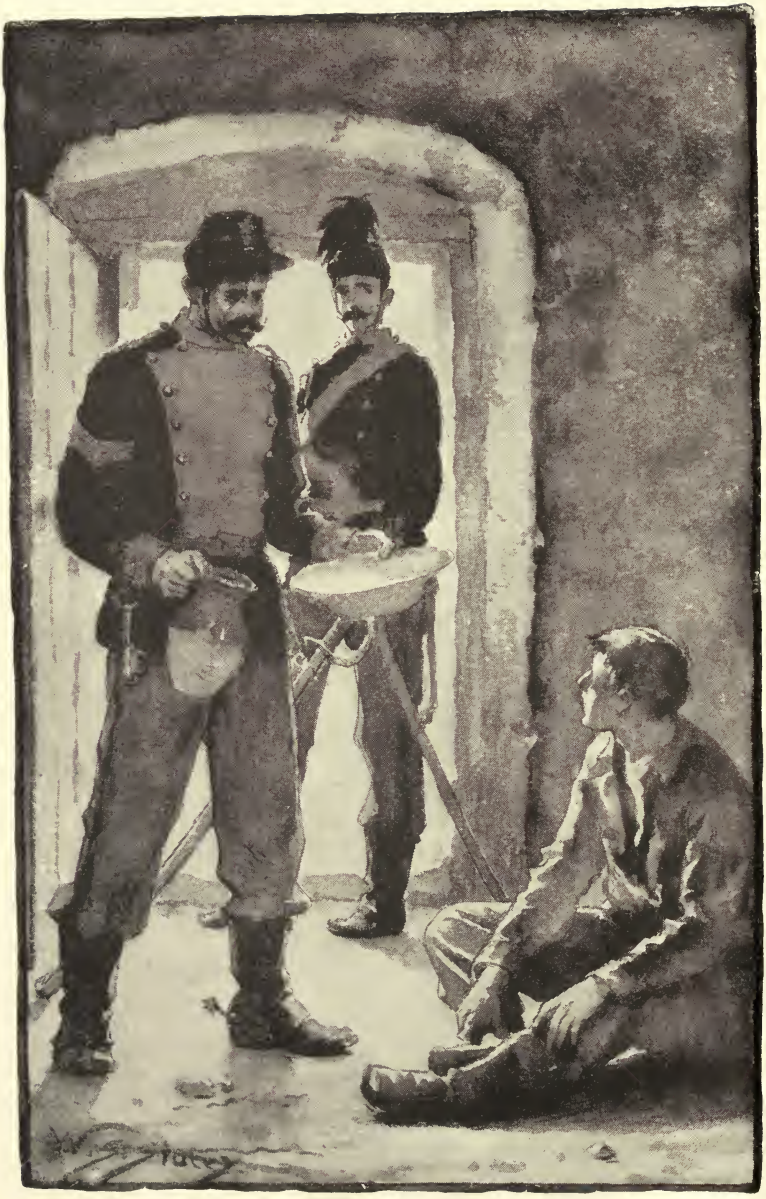

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A prisoner (p. 110)

UNDER THE LONE STAR

A STORY OF REVOLUTION IN NICARAGUA

BY

HERBERT HAYENS

AUTHOR OF "THE RED, WHITE, AND GREEN"
"A CAPTAIN OF IRREGULARS," ETC.

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UNDER THE LONE STAR.

CHAPTER I.

I MAKE A FRIEND.

IT was the last night in the year 1854 A.D., and I, Colin Foster, crouched shiveringly in the doorway of a tumble-down house in a side street of San Francisco.

The old year was dying hard—the cruel, sad old year that had worked such woe to me—and all the forces in nature had gathered to attend its obsequies. The heavens were obscured by dark clouds; a cold, piercing wind swept the streets with savage fury; the thunder pealed forth, as it were, a solemn death-chant, and occasionally a brilliant, snaky streak of lightning darted through the black curtain, zigzagging in fantastic lines to the earth.

It was bitterly cold, and drawing my poor thin coat tightly across my chest, I crept yet more closely into the angle of the doorway for shelter.

Presently a light springy step sounded on the pavement, and the figure of a man passed before me. The next moment he was struggling fiercely with two other men, who had sprung from a neighbouring recess.

Though very young, I had been too long habituated to hardship and danger not to recognize that the passenger was in extreme peril.

To have cried for help would have been madness; the locality was infested by reckless and unscrupulous people, who held life in light esteem, and who would have interfered only with the object of sharing in the plunder.

Yet it was impossible to remain quietly there whilst the unequal combat was being waged; and stealing cautiously out, I leaped suddenly upon one of the ruffians from behind, and pinioning his arms in mine, we rolled over into the mud.

The second scoundrel, alarmed by this unexpected diversion, disappeared; and my own antagonist, a strong, brawny man, freeing himself by a vigorous jerk from my embrace, struck me a violent blow on the head, and rushed off in the same direction as his comrade.

The stranger turned and assisted me to rise. "Thanks," he said, in a peculiarly slow and low-toned voice; "you have rendered me good service. Come with me."

I tried to speak, but could not; the blow had made me dizzy, and it was with difficulty I crawled along at his side. Fortunately we soon reached the busier part of the town, and my companion led me into a building which still showed signs of bustle and activity.

Each moment the pain grew greater, my head burned, black spots danced before my eyes, and with a faint cry I fell on the floor.

Of what happened afterwards I have only a confused

recollection. I could hear the murmur of voices, without being able to distinguish the words; then came the sensation of being lifted with womanly gentleness, and carried somewhere; then I was dimly aware of a jolting, uneven motion, and after that I remember no more.

I suppose I must have been very ill, but it was a delightful time to me, for the present was all forgotten, and I was once more a tiny child toddling at my mother's knees. She came back to me, my dead mother, with her sweet, beautiful face, and happy tears flowed from her dear eyes as she hugged and kissed her little one again.

Afterwards my father joined her, and there was a holy peace in his calm grave face as he whispered words of comfort, bidding me not to be afraid, for they were watching over and guarding me from evil.

Ah me! what a beautiful thing is even the memory of a parent's love!

When at length I once more awakened to the outer world, I found myself lying in bed in a small room, with a tall man smiling kindly into my face.

"Ah, my lad!" he said pleasantly, "that is better; now we shall soon get you strong and well."

It seemed very strange lying there, for I did not remember what had occurred; but I was too comfortable to wonder much, and when the gentleman gave me a glass of something that looked like tea, I drank it submissively, and fell asleep.

The next time I awoke the sun was shining brightly into the room, and presently the gentleman who had been

attacked by the robbers came in. He was not very tall, and to me he did not seem strong; but that, I discovered later, was a mistake. His hair was cut quite close, and it was very thin and sandy. He did not wear a beard, and his face was covered with freckles. He had a large, round forehead and sharp grey eyes, but he looked at me so kindly that I felt sure I should like him.

Coming to the bed, he asked cheerfully, "Well, my boy, do you think you are strong enough to get up this morning?"

"Yes, sir, I feel quite well now," I answered; "but where are my clothes?"

"Ah! that is a matter of some importance. No getting up without clothes, eh?" and leaving the room, he came back in a short time carrying a beautiful new suit.

"O sir!" I began, and a great lump came into my throat, "these are not mine; mine are quite old and ragged." But he only smiled, and told me to dress myself and come downstairs, where breakfast was waiting.

I noticed that my host ate and drank very sparingly; but he filled my plate with good things, and would not permit me to speak until I had fully satisfied my hunger.

Then rolling a cigarette between his fingers, he said, "Now, my young friend, tell me all about yourself."

"There is very little to tell, sir," I answered, "except my name, and that is Colin Foster. My parents are dead, and I am alone in the world."

"English?"

"Yes; my father was a doctor in Yorkshire. My

mother died when I was ten years old, and the next year my father sold his practice and came to California. He died three months ago. Since then I have been living anyhow—earning sufficient sometimes to procure food and shelter; sometimes half-starved, sleeping in the streets."

"Age?"

"Sixteen."

"Hum! tall, well-made, and plenty of bone. Ought to be strong with enough nourishing food. Well, what do you propose to do now?"

This was an exceedingly difficult question to answer, for I had not a single idea in my head. As far as my knowledge went, I was absolutely without a friend either in America or in England.

The gentleman, perceiving my hesitation, continued, "You can read and write, I suppose?"

This question cheered me wonderfully, and my face brightened. "Oh, yes!" I answered eagerly; "my father never neglected my education. He himself taught me all the usual school subjects, in addition to French and Spanish."

"Can you speak Spanish?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, listen to me. You have done me a good turn, Colin Foster, and you shall not find me ungrateful. My name is Walker—William Walker—and I am at present the editor of a newspaper. I daresay I can find you work, and you can board and lodge in my house. I have only one warning to give—you must be perfectly honest

and obedient. Half a lie, and we part company. Do you understand?"

For nearly a minute I sat without making answer, my good fortune overpowered me. A short time previously I was hungry, homeless, and half naked; now I had secured a powerful friend, a good home, and a prospect of regular employment. The happy tears chased each other down my cheeks as I thanked my benefactor for his kindness.

"You shall begin to-morrow morning," he said; "to-day you had better rest. I am going out now, and shall not be home until the evening, but my housekeeper will take good care of you. If you are fond of reading, there are books in my study. Keep up your French and Spanish; you may find them useful."

He took me to the library and went out, leaving me in a kind of earthly paradise.

The room was a small one, bare of actual furniture save one or two chairs and a plain deal table, upon which stood a worn, ink-stained writing-desk; but all around the walls were rows of well-filled book-shelves.

Of the contents of many of the books I was entirely ignorant, but one shelf, which I could just reach without the aid of the step-ladder, was filled with soberly-bound volumes which instantly excited my interest.

I opened the first; it was a portion of Prescott's "History of the Conquest of Mexico," and carrying it to the table, I was speedily absorbed in its fascinating pages. For two or three hours I sat reading, heedless of the flight of time, until Mr. Walker's housekeeper—a pleasant,

motherly woman—came to tell me that dinner was ready.

Directly I could beat a retreat from the dining-room, I hurried back to my beloved book, and eagerly devoured the entrancing narrative, until the fading light warned me to desist.

The next morning my work at the office began, and for several weeks I had not a single cause for uneasiness or complaint. My duties were light, my employer kind, and every evening I was permitted to sit in his library until bed-time, reading or studying as I chose.

Suddenly an alteration occurred, the reason for which I did not at first comprehend. Mr., or Colonel Walker, as people called him, became engrossed in some business which had nothing to do with the newspaper. Letters and packets were constantly arriving at his office: government communications; missives bearing foreign post-marks; notes marked 'Urgent'; dirty scraps of paper scrawled over with unintelligible hieroglyphics—unintelligible at least to any one save my employer.

Then strange men began to drop in—now singly, now in twos and threes, or even larger groups—huge, bearded men, broad-shouldered and deep-chested, dressed in coarse woollen shirts, and having the bottoms of their trousers tucked into thick, heavy boots.

Others came, too, of a different class—moneyed men, merchants and ship-owners, and, once or twice, well-dressed men from the Eastern States, whose faces looked grave and serious, sometimes downcast. But they all wanted the colonel, and were all in a desperate hurry.

Looking back on those days, I often wonder when my employer slept. At the earliest dawn he left his house, and frequently did not return until after midnight. Nothing seemed to worry him; he opened every letter with the same apparent unconcern, and none could tell, judging by the still unmoved features, whether he had received good news or ill.

One morning, upon leaving the office, I was accosted by a man who wished to know where the colonel was, and who appeared greatly disappointed on finding that I could not tell him.

"Perhaps," I suggested, "it might answer your purpose were you to leave a message with me. I must see him directly he returns, as I have important news for him."

"Do you live at his house?" he asked; and when I answered in the affirmative, he continued eagerly, "Then perhaps you can tell me if it's true that the colonel is organizing another little picnic down south. Oh, you needn't be afraid; I'm Phil Trevethik; I was with him in Sonora," and the man drew himself up proudly.

"See here," pointing to a deep scar on his left cheek, "that's what I got in Sonora; but I'm ready again. He's thorough grit, is the colonel, God bless him! and if what Brogan and the others are saying is true, you tell him that Phil Trevethik is on hand. I'll come up again in the morning, and you can give me his answer."

"But what is the story?" I inquired timidly, for I was intensely curious to learn the meaning of what was going on.

"Don't you know? Dennis Brogan says—and Dennis went through the Sonora business—that the colonel is going down into Nic—Nicar something or other, among the Dons and Indians and half-breeds, to help some Don to do something, I don't exactly know what; but anyway you say to the colonel that where he goes, Phil Trevethik goes too."

This explanation was not very lucid, but I gathered sufficient to understand that Colonel Walker was organizing an expedition into Nicaragua; and having made an appointment with the stranger for the following morning, I hastened home in the hope that the colonel might have returned.

I must confess that my anxiety was not so much on Trevethik's account as on my own. Possessing an inherent love of travel and adventure, the vagabond existence of the last few years had not tended to lessen it; besides which, my employer had become endeared to me, and I did not like to think of his rushing into danger, unless I were there to share it with him.

The evening was far advanced when he entered the library, where I was busily engaged in studying a map of Central America, and beyond the customary greeting I said nothing until he had finished with the pile of dispatches which lay upon his desk.

"Is there anything I can do, sir?" I asked, as he opened the desk and drew out some writing materials.

"Thanks, no! I have only a letter or two to write, and then I am going to the office for an hour. But what

have you there?" he added abruptly, glancing at the atlas on my knees.

"A map of Central America. I have been studying the situation of 'Nicar something or other,' as Phil Trevethik terms it. I was to tell you, sir, that if you are organizing a picnic down there, Trevethik is looking for an invitation; and, O Mr. Walker!" I concluded with a rapid burst, "you will take me too, will you not?"

I had never before seen him so moved. His eyes were quite soft and womanly, and he spoke in a low gentle voice.

"Trevethik is a strong man," he murmured, "inured to danger; but you, my lad," and he placed his hand on my shoulder with a half-caress, "do you know what you ask? I am going to toil, exposure, privation, perhaps death. Unless I succeed in this desperate enterprise, I shall be exposed to the taunts and mockery of my countrymen. They will blacken my character; they will brand my name with infamy; they will accuse me of being a lawless freebooter with nothing but low, sordid aims. For all these things I care little, because I have what I believe to be a noble end in view; but why should you run heedlessly into peril? You are doing well; even without me your future is assured, though I have not forgotten your interests."

"That is it, sir!" I cried impulsively; "you have supplied the reason. In all the world I have but one friend, and that is yourself. You have been a father to me, you have saved me from starvation, you have fed and clothed

me, and given me your friendship; let me make this small return for all your kindness. I am only a boy, but I am strong and faithful, and it may perhaps happen, as in the old fable, that the lion may have need of the mouse."

He still hesitated, but at length, yielding to my earnest entreaties, he agreed that if, after thinking the matter over carefully, I still wished to go, he would take me as his secretary.

"You must serve in some capacity," he remarked, "and I cannot enrol you either as a private or as an officer."

"And Trevethik, sir; what answer am I to give him?"

"Tell him to call here to-morrow evening at nine. Now I must go out; but remember there is yet plenty of time for you to draw back."

When the colonel had gone I returned to my map, but for a long time sat staring at it without seeing anything, my brain was too excited; so, giving it up in despair, I went to bed.

From that time I began to be more intimately acquainted with my employer's private concerns, and to understand something of the motives which actuated him. I also set diligently to work to refresh my memory with the Spanish language; and recognizing that my mind was finally made up, Colonel Walker afforded me every assistance in his power.

As the days wore on, he became, if possible, busier than ever, so that often neither of us was able to snatch more than three or four hours' sleep out of the twenty-four.

Now, too, I began to perceive what a host of difficulties surrounded him; but he never appeared discouraged. Speaking little and rarely smiling, he went on in a cool, even way, brushing aside some obstacles, surmounting others, unheeding the sneers of his enemies, blind to the timid counsels of lukewarm friends. Calm and unflinching, he pursued his course with a high faith and noble resolve, that forced respect and admiration from all those with whom he came into contact.

At length everything was in readiness. A vessel had been purchased—a slow, unwieldy, clumsy-looking craft called the *Vesta*. Trevethik irreverently designated it the *Washing-Tub*, though, as he added philosophically, it would probably carry us over, and we need not trouble ourselves about the means of coming back.

On the morning of May 14, 1855, we proceeded on board, and were congratulating ourselves on bidding adieu to San Francisco, when an unexpected difficulty presented itself. The captain, alarmed at the idea of coming into collision with the law—for some creditors of the former owners of the *Vesta* had secured an injunction forbidding her to sail—refused to proceed, and went ashore.

Every one save the colonel was in consternation. What was to be done? We could not sail without a captain, and every moment's delay increased our embarrassment, more especially as a United States revenue cutter lay close at hand, and an order from the authorities might arrive at any moment to detain us.

After a hurried consultation between the officers, one of

them got into the boat and was rowed ashore; while the men hung about the deck in little knots, discussing the untoward event.

All the afternoon and evening we waited, until the shades of night fell, wrapping the ship in a black mantle. The majority of the men had already sought their bunks, and I was leaning over the vessel's side lazily watching the distant lights of the town, when a low hail aroused my attention, and peering into the gloom, I could just descry the shadowy outlines of a boat.

The officer had returned, bringing with him the new captain of the *Vesta*, and our initial difficulty was at an end.

CHAPTER II.

FAIRLY STARTED.

THE morning after the *Vesta* had been got under way, the company was mustered on the after-deck to receive an address from the leader.

The experiences of my Californian life had brought me into contact with all sorts and conditions of men, but I had never seen, collected in one band, such a determined, resolute set as now stood facing Walker and his officers.

There were, as nearly as I could judge, about fifty of them, and not a man who did not reach several inches above the average height. They were not in uniform, save that each man wore a red ribbon decorating his black slouch hat, but there was a striking similarity in their picturesque if rough attire.

A rough woollen shirt, blue or red in colour, and open at the front, covered the brawny shoulders; while thick, coarse trousers were tucked into heavy, high-topped boots. In the broad belt worn round the waist were displayed conspicuously a revolver and that cruel-looking weapon the bowie-knife, which is peculiarly the property of the wild Westerner.

Striking, however, as was the picture thus formed, the eye soon ceased travelling over the details of their dress, attracted by the men themselves. They were of various nationalities, though the majority were undoubtedly genuine Americans. A fair sprinkling belonged to my own country, and here and there one detected the laughing features of a merry-hearted son of Erin and the impassive countenance of a taciturn Scot.

As I have stated, they were all tall and, without exception, strongly built. For the most part they carried little flesh, and the well-developed muscles of their arms stood out like iron. Many, like Trevethik, bore the traces of previous adventures in deep scars on their weather-beaten faces; and even to a youngster like myself it was plainly evident that these were no ordinary men whom my employer had banded together to take part in his daring and hazardous enterprise.

Of what manner of men they were, morally speaking, I knew nothing. That they were brave, resolute, and unflinching, capable of enduring terrible hardships and privations, dogged, determined, and absolute strangers to fear, could be easily read in the keen, flashing eyes and firm, compressed lips.

Hitherto I had known Colonel Walker only as a civilian, a peaceful citizen directing the affairs of a prosperous newspaper; now he appeared in his true capacity—a born leader of men.

To me at first it appeared marvellous that this slight, spare man, who scarcely reached to the shoulders of some

of the giants confronting him, and who certainly was not the equal of any one of them in physical strength, should aspire to the leadership of such a reckless band.

He was very simply dressed, without the slightest pretensions to martial appearance, and yet, in a short time, I felt he was the truest soldier there.

His face was calm and emotionless. His sharp grey eyes flashed for an instant over his assembled followers, and then, without preamble, he spoke.

"Boys," he began in his slow quiet voice, "you all know more or less the nature of the business which has brought us on board this vessel; but, in case any one does not clearly understand our errand, I am going to put it to you again. First, our destination is Nicaragua, which I hope to reach about the middle of June. There we shall find matters in a very unsettled state. There are two parties—the Serviles and the Liberals—in the country, each striving to gain the mastery over the other. Last October my friend, Byron Cole, made an agreement with Don Francisco Castellon, the leader of the Liberals, to send a body of Americans to his aid on certain conditions. With these conditions you have already been made acquainted, but I will repeat the two most important. As long as the war lasts you will draw your military pay; at the end of it you will receive a liberal grant of land, with full liberty to settle down as citizens of Nicaragua. One thing only I have to impress upon you—we go into Nicaragua as soldiers, not as freebooters. I see amongst you many trusty comrades who followed my lead in Sonora;

they will tell you what serving under William Walker means."

"Faith, we will," cried Dennis Brogan, with a comical grin: "hard knocks and hard work in plenty, with precious little comfort to balance them, but fair play and a leader who goes in front of his men."

A sympathetic growl of approval greeted the Irishman's speech, and Walker continued quietly: "One word more and I have done. We are going to make war upon soldiers, and the man who disgraces my command by robbery or by any act of violence will get a short shrift. Nicaragua is a glorious country; we have a grand opportunity, and if we do not make the most of it we shall have none but ourselves to blame. Now, that's enough speechifying; one brush with the enemy will be worth a month of speeches."

The men saluted and broke up into groups, while Walker, accompanied by two of his officers, retired to the cabin which had been set apart for him.

Perceiving Trevethik standing chatting with Brogan, I crossed the deck and joined them. To the Irishman I had not yet spoken; but between his companion and myself there had sprung up a curious friendship, which grew and strengthened day by day.

"Well, Mr. Foster," he exclaimed genially, "and what do you think of our company now?"

"They look capable of rendering a good account of themselves," I answered honestly; "I rather pity the Dons with whom they come into contact."

"Faith!" ejaculated the Irishman, "when the colonel

gets inside his fighting shirt, and the green light comes into his eyes, ye may well pity the Dons."

"Is the colonel then such a tremendous fighter?" I asked. "To me he seems quite a nice, mild-tempered gentleman."

The two men laughed uproariously, as if I had perpetrated some merry jest, and Trevethik, laying his hand on my arm, said, "Ah, Mr. Foster, you are young as yet, and this is your first campaign with him; if you live until the end of it, you will be able to answer your own question. Pardon me, sir, if I offer you a word of advice: don't you ever cross the colonel. He is true as steel and tender as a woman; but I would rather hug a grizzly bear robbed of her cubs than set what Dennis calls the 'green light' dancing in his eyes."

"And yet you seem to be fond of him!"

"Ay, I would sacrifice my life for him willingly; he has saved it more than once, and will again should the opportunity offer."

"I am glad to hear you say that," I cried enthusiastically, "for he is my best, I might almost say, my only friend."

Before Trevethik could reply, a man brought an order for me to repair to the cabin, where the colonel required my assistance in copying out some papers, so, bidding adieu to my companions, I hastened away.

It is, I have since discovered, a common observation that life on board ship brings people into far closer intimacy than life on shore, and so it was now.

Every day, nay, almost every hour, presented some

opportunity for studying the colonel's character, watching his behaviour, and listening to his conversation.

One evening, which afforded me the first real glimpse of his true motives and boundless ambition, I well remember.

We were seated—the colonel, his officers, and myself—in his little cabin, when the conversation turned upon the expedition in which we were engaged.

Some one, I think it was Timothy Crocker (afterwards Major Crocker), made a remark which induced our leader to reply more freely than was usual with him.

"Gentlemen," he said with grave earnestness, "whenever I return to this subject, I am impressed anew with a sense of the tremendous possibilities before us. Let us glance at the case dispassionately. Here is one of the fairest portions of the earth—a beautiful country combining within itself every advantage of the tropics and the temperate zones. Here Nature has lavished her most bounteous blessings. Fruits of almost every variety—the citron, the lemon, the orange, and the banana—spring in reckless profusion from the bosom of the bountiful earth, almost untended by the hand of man. Hundreds of thousands of acres of fertile soil lie waiting the care of the husbandman, ready to repay his labour a thousand-fold. Immense forests require only man's energy and toil to yield a princely revenue. Magnificent waterways abound for the development of enormous trade. The country commands a splendid geographical situation; yet, with all these advantages, it is a blight and curse on the earth. And whose is the fault, gentlemen? I answer—man's! What is the average

Nicaraguan of to-day ?—a mere eating, drinking, and sleeping animal. He is ignorant, worthless, and debased. His rulers know not how to govern; his country is torn by revolution after revolution—a prey to internal dissensions and outside attacks. Without our aid, all this misery will be perpetuated; Don Francisco will fall before the Serviles, and all chance of an enlightened policy will perish with him. If, on the contrary, our expedition should succeed, what a glorious future lies before Nicaragua! When this devastating war is ended, we will establish order and a stable government. Under the flag of the Lone Star, life and property shall be as secure as beneath the Stars and Stripes. I foresee, in the course of a few years, the growth of a powerful navy, the formation of a brave and trusty standing army, the erection of great cities, the development of trade, agriculture, and manufactures, the spread of education, the elevation of morality, and everything conducive to the welfare of a strong and powerful country, respected at home and feared abroad."

From the lips of an ordinary man this language would perhaps have sounded extravagant and absurd, but coming from him it seemed quite natural. In his presence the difficulties which surrounded our undertaking faded away; we forgot the paucity of our forces and ignored the dangers which beset us.

Even to this day I cannot quite understand the secret of our leader's influence. His appearance was not striking. With the exception of an expansive forehead and keen grey eyes, his features were rather plain and commonplace.

His speech was slow, and betrayed no mark of eloquence and oratory; he made no pretensions to display; his only previous military expedition—that to Sonora—had ended in disastrous failure, yet in our little circle I am sure there was scarcely a man who did not thoroughly believe in his ultimate success.

Perhaps the secret of his power lay in his implicit confidence in himself. The name by which, as I learned afterwards, he was popularly known seemed to me to suit him admirably. He was emphatically the "Grey-eyed Man of Destiny." In his calculations there existed no element of doubt; to him the certainty of the sun's rising with the morrow's dawn was no more assured than the successful completion of his own enterprise. Nicaragua, free and independent, was for him but a question of time.

Our voyage proved monotonous and uneventful. The old washing-tub, as Trevethik had nicknamed the *Vesta*, tossed and rolled alarmingly; still she managed to keep her course without any real mishap, and slowly, very slowly she approached the port of Old Realejo, at which we were to disembark.

Touching at Tigre Island, we took on board a pilot, and on the sixteenth of June, to every one's unaffected delight, we cast anchor.

All was now briskness and activity, for we were eager to bid farewell to the *Vesta*, and the men worked with a will. Old Realejo was but the wreck of a former town; the proper port being situated some five miles inland, whither we were to be conveyed in canoes.

These latter, called by the natives *bongoes*, were primitive-looking structures, being merely hollowed-out logs from the ceiba tree.

"What are these things?" exclaimed Phil Trevethik in a tone of disgust as he caught sight of them.

"Arrah, now be aisy, lad," returned the Irishman; "shure they're the old *Vesta's* childher—the darlint. When they grow up they will be rale ships like their mother."

A volley of laughter greeted Brogan's good-humoured satire, and as it died away the colonel's voice was heard. Instantly every man stood to attention while he spoke a few simple words.

"My lads," he said, "our work now begins in earnest. To-day we plant our feet for the first time on Nicaraguan soil; let us remember we are American soldiers, ready to do our duty whatever may happen. Captain Doubleday awaits us at New Realejo with instructions from the president, and he has sent these canoes for our use."

As the colonel's secretary I took my place in the first boat, and, all being in readiness, the novel procession started. Very soon we made the satisfactory discovery that the "*Vesta's* childher" were much more comfortable than the *Vesta*, and I at least quite enjoyed the journey.

At New Realejo the colonel jumped ashore, landed his men, formed them into a solid phalanx, and, putting himself at the head, gave the order to march, amidst a few feeble *Vivas!* from the little crowd which had assembled to watch the operations.

In the plaza we were met by two mounted officers, who rode forward and saluted our leader, a courtesy which he returned.

Vaulting lightly from their horses, they approached on foot, and one of them, a bronzed, bearded man, who, from his gait and general appearance, I decided was an inhabitant of the States, extending his hand, exclaimed heartily, "Welcome, colonel, to Nicaragua. Allow me to play the part of master of the ceremonies. I am Captain Doubleday, my colleague is Colonel Ramirez, and we have both the honour of belonging to the Nicaraguan army, under General Jose Trinidad Munoz."

Colonel Walker bowed, and in turn presented his officers, Achilles Kewen, Timothy Crocker, and, to my unbounded astonishment, myself, Colin Foster.

This formality being at an end, the colonel continued, "Now, captain, I shall be glad to learn what arrangements have been made for our reception."

Captain Doubleday repeated this observation in Spanish to Colonel Ramirez, and, after a whispered consultation, answered, "For the present we have decided to lodge your men at the Hacienda Rivina, the seat of Don Jose Camenza, about six miles further inland, where they can remain until you have ascertained the general's orders. He is at Leon, and will be glad to receive you at the very earliest opportunity. To speak truth, we are in a sore strait, and your arrival is most opportune."

"Let me see my men comfortably settled, and I am at your service the next instant."

"We will accompany you to the hacienda; it is on our way to Leon, where General Munoz awaits us."

The colonel issued his orders; the men, who had been standing at ease, promptly fell into their ranks, and once more we prepared to march.

Very soon we had left the town of Realejo in our rear. The day was bright and warm, but a cool wind blew refreshingly in our faces as we tramped cheerfully along, while the men whistled or hummed snatches of music to beguile the tedium of the march.

Presently our guides turned off abruptly to the left, where the road became merely a trodden track, cut up by the wheels of heavy carts, and bordered on either side by huge, heavily-branched trees.

"A sweet pretty place this for a trap, Mr. Foster," whispered Trevethik grimly, for I had fallen back from the front, and was marching beside him; "fifty men in our rear, and a dozen or so good shots behind that timber, would wipe out the colonel's command as completely as if it had never been."

"But there are no enemies within fifty miles of us," I answered.

"No, the colonel's pretty well posted, you may be sure; but from what I can learn of these Dons and niggers, you can never be too careful. Keep your eyes and ears open, Mr. Foster. There'll be plenty of promotion in this corps before long, and if you should be trusted with the lives of a body of men, you would not like to lose them for want of a little forethought."

"You are talking nonsense, Trevethik," I answered, but at the same time blushing furiously; "why, I am only a boy, and not yet even an officer."

"How much older than you is young O'Neill, and he is a lieutenant, and none better either? Hallo! there's the hacienda."

The track had broadened considerably—we were getting clear of the trees—and raising my eyes I saw what at first appeared to be a little village enclosed by a stout fence.

The sight astonished me considerably, for until then my notions of a hacienda had been very vague and indefinite. This one, owing to its situation and the troubled state of the country, had been converted into a kind of rude fortress; but, with that exception, it was very similar to others which I afterwards saw.

As we approached, we perceived that the building was surrounded by a ditch some twenty feet wide and, perhaps, twelve feet deep, on the other side of which was a strong adobe wall. Access to the yard could be gained only by a drawbridge, which led directly to the first yard or *patio*.

Our coming had apparently been anticipated. The drawbridge was lowered, and as we crossed, a tall, soldierly man, dressed in Spanish costume, came slowly down the patio, followed by a motley group of serving-men.

Having saluted Ramirez and Doubleday, with whom he seemed well acquainted, he was introduced to Colonel Walker, whom he welcomed with a grave, stately courtesy.

"Your men, colonel," he said, "will find their quarters rough; our resources are not ample, but to what we have

they are freely welcome. At any rate we can provide them with a dry shelter and sufficient food, and soldiers do not generally look for luxuries. Pray follow me, and I will show you the apartments. Yourself and your officers will perhaps do me the honour of joining my own family."

"I thank you cordially for your hospitality, Don Jose, but the officers remain with the men," replied the colonel—"at least those who stay here; I myself am departing almost immediately for Leon. But we are delaying the troops. With your leave, we will get them settled."

The old Don bowed, and led the way into the second patio, surrounded, like the first, by low rooms, the walls of which were of immense thickness, and were constructed of stones mixed with mud.

Here our company was divided into three groups, and, entering the rooms which had been hastily prepared for their reception, the men ranged themselves round some rough wooden tables, and were speedily supplied with a generous meal, which the kindly Don had had the forethought to provide.

Then pipes were produced and lit; the hum of conversation broke out afresh, song and jest went merrily round, and, despite the strange situation and the grave dangers confronting us in the immediate future, every one seemed bent upon pleasure and enjoyment.

CHAPTER III.

I RECEIVE MY COMMISSION.

THUS far the expedition had proved quite an enjoyable pleasure trip, and I was congratulating myself on my comfortable quarters, when Colonel Walker, who had previously left the room, returned and called me to his side.

"I am starting for Leon in a quarter of an hour," he said briskly. "Ask Mr. Kewen to come here, and be prepared yourself to accompany me."

In a short time Mr. Kewen stood before the chief, who was now joined by Mr. Crocker and Captain Doubleday.

"We are going to Leon, Mr. Kewen," he said, "in order to have an interview with the president. During my absence you will please take command. The men are on no account to leave the hacienda. You will post sentries and keep a sharp look out, and be prepared to march at a moment's notice."

Kewen saluted; the colonel spoke a few words to the men, explaining his movements; and we passed out into the courtyard, where Don Jose had caused horses to be brought in readiness.

In addition to the two Nicaraguan officers, the party consisted of the colonel, Mr. Crocker, and myself. Colonel Ramirez, who knew the road, led the way, accompanied by Mr. Crocker, and they were followed by the colonel and Captain Doubleday, while I brought up the rear.

In this order we proceeded for several miles without meeting with any interruption, as that part of the country was practically free from the Serviles. Indeed I heard Captain Doubleday express his surprise that our leader should have troubled himself about posting sentries at the hacienda.

About four o'clock in the morning, Ramirez drew rein at the gates of a large farm-house, where we procured food for our horses and a little refreshment for ourselves. Fortunately the weather continued fine, though this was rather unusual, as the rainy season had already commenced, and we knew that until the end of October we might expect a succession of violent rains.

By this time all the members of our party, with the exception of Colonel Walker, began to show the effects of want of sleep and the long ride; but he seemed to scorn fatigue, and as soon as the horses were sufficiently rested, was once again in the saddle, much, I could perceive, to our guide's disgust.

As we approached the city we were met and stopped several times by small bodies of mounted soldiers; but a few words from Colonel Ramirez satisfied them as to our designs, and with a military salute from their officers, to which we responded, they rode off.

Colonel Walker now pushed forward with the guide; while Mr. Crocker fell back to Captain Doubleday, and bade me join them.

I was by this time very stiff and sore with the unusual exercise; but I soon lost all sense of fatigue in the excitement produced by the novel sights and sounds which presented themselves on every hand.

The town was full of soldiers, whose picturesque uniforms gave warmth and colour to the strange scene. As we advanced further into the city my astonishment became greater and greater. I do not exactly know what I had expected to see, but certainly it was not that which actually met my view.

The streets were long, rectangular, and spacious, with broad open squares intervening. We passed numerous private houses, mostly confined to one story; some white and shining, others grey and venerable. All alike, however, possessed few windows, and these were surrounded by a heavy iron balcony. The bars of this balcony were secured from above in the form of a cage, admitting neither of ingress nor of egress.

To me the sight of these iron cages, though novel, was far from pleasing; they seemed somehow to suggest more of a prison than of a home.

Just after entering the town we met a heavy cart with clumsy wooden wheels, drawn by a pair of oxen yoked together by the horns.

Nothing but the presence of the soldiers in unusually large numbers showed that the country was in a state of

anarchy. The shops were open and plying a brisk trade; while in the market-places which we passed the stalls literally groaned under the heavy weight of fruits and vegetables, which were to be seen in almost endless variety and boundless profusion. The people, too, passed along in a constant stream, chatting and laughing gaily, as though their lives were spent in uninterrupted security. I would gladly have lingered in order to watch the puzzling but animated kaleidoscope they presented; and Captain Doubleday, noticing my wonder and admiration, very kindly rode round to my side and directed my attention to the chief points of interest.

I did not remember having seen many finer public buildings, which he informed me were the most splendid in Central America, especially the cathedral, a large, massive and noble-looking edifice, crowned by a lofty central dome, and flanked by two towers; but at the moment my interest was centred in the people.

I had seen many varieties of the human race in San Francisco, but this was a new experience. All classes found representatives in the crowds which filled the streets. Here a caballero, or native gentleman, dressed in European style, sauntered along with a certain stately grace inherited from some far-distant Don of the Iberian Peninsula; there a group of doñas and señoras with costly shawls or silken hoods with lace mantillas. Next to them came a bevy of women of the lower classes, their heads covered with the universal mantilla, and their glossy black hair braided with bright, gaudy silk ribbons.

These women seemed to delight in the most startling tints, for their costumes, though exceedingly graceful, were of the gayest and most gorgeous colours. Mingling and contrasting with the bright hues of the women's dresses, I caught sight occasionally of the black cassock and long shovel hat of some reverend padre or priest, pacing along with slow step and eyes downcast.

Presently our guide stopped in front of a long building facing the great plaza, and to my disappointment I learned that our journey was ended. Numbers of soldiers were passing in and out through the capacious gateways, before each of which stood a man armed with a loaded rifle on duty.

"This is the Cuartel General," Captain Doubleday said—by which I knew he meant the head barracks—"where we shall probably find both General Munoz and the president. At the least, we shall enjoy a rest, and I reckon we shall all appreciate that; what do you say, Mr. Crocker?"

"That as likely as not it will be a short one, as far as Mr. Foster and I are concerned. Directly the colonel gets his business settled, we shall be *en route* for the hacienda. Ah!" he added laughingly, "you do not know William Walker yet; he will waken up some of your old Dons, I warrant. We had better follow them into the courtyard. —Foster, my boy, do not neglect my advice: if you can secure an hour's sleep, do so at the first opportunity."

By this time the colonel had dismounted, and bidding us follow Captain Doubleday, he himself accompanied our

guide into a capacious apartment, where we understood President Castellon and the general awaited him.

We were now joined by a group of native officers, who treated us with the greatest kindness, carrying us off to their mess-room, where in a short time we were provided with quite a sumptuous meal, to which both Mr. Crocker and myself did hearty justice. Several of the dishes were quite unknown to me then, although afterwards I became well acquainted with them.

Naturally the conversation turned upon the war, and the part we were likely to take in it. Now I found how fortunate it was that I had brushed up my Spanish, for to my great delight I was able to follow the discussion readily.

I learned that the Serviles were in great force at Granada, which city they had made their capital, but that they had a considerable body of troops lying near Rivas, a small town farther south.

Some of our hosts thought that General Munoz, while maintaining the greater part of his army near Leon, would dispatch a regiment or so to the south by sea, and thus place the enemy between two fires; but this idea did not meet with much favour.

"Depend upon it," said one, a grizzled, weather-beaten old veteran, "Munoz will keep all his troops together, and act upon the defensive."

Crocker smiled grimly when he heard this. "Whatever their old Don does," he said to me, "our swords are not likely to rust where Colonel Walker is in command."

I was about to answer when a subaltern officer brought

a message that the president wished to see Major Crocker and Lieutenant Foster.

A pleased smile came over my comrade's face at the sound of his new title, and he clapped me upon the back. "Come, lieutenant," he said; "we must not keep Don Francisco waiting."

I rose to my feet in a sort of stupid wonder, hardly knowing what to make of it. Almost before I could recover from my astonishment, the major hurried me off to the room which our leader had previously entered, where we found him talking to two gentlemen, one dressed as a civilian, while the other was in uniform, and who I knew could be no others than Don Francisco Castellon, the president, and his general, Don Jose Trinidad Munoz, the commander-in-chief of the Leonese army.

The president was a fine-looking man with clear intellectual features, and possessing an air of nobility.

"Gentlemen," he said, speaking in Spanish, "I have sent for you because I wished to have the pleasure of delivering to you with my own hands your commissions in the Nicaraguan army, or, more strictly speaking, that portion of it which will be known as 'La Falange Americana,' under the immediate command of Colonel Walker. I am confident that you will prove yourselves worthy of your chief's recommendation."

The newly-made major, whose knowledge of Spanish was not extensive, motioned me to reply, and I said, "Your excellency's confidence is not misplaced; we are ready to follow our leader wherever he bids us."

As we prepared to depart, Colonel Walker remarked, "Major, we leave in three hours' time.—Lieutenant Foster, I have a word for you," and, with a bow to the others, he followed me into the courtyard.

I have heard it said that our chief was a hard, stern man, with no sympathy in his breast for any one but himself; but to me he ever proved friendly and kind-hearted.

Placing his hand on my shoulder he said, with a grave seriousness, "Colin, my lad, you now have your foot upon the ladder; it remains for you to mount. Let me give you a few words of advice. Remember that you are now a soldier, and a soldier's first duty is obedience. Thus far you have proved honest and trustworthy. Persevere in that course; do not be turned aside from the path of honour by any seeming advantages to be gained by dishonesty. Life without honour is worthless. Set before your eyes a high standard, and strive to live up to it. Be kind—no good man is ever cruel—give freely of your strength to help the weak and oppressed. Live your life nobly; be loyal and true-hearted to your God and your conscience; so that if you fall in the approaching contest, your spirit may appear unstained before its Judge. Now I must give you your first orders as an officer of La Falange Americana. I am returning almost immediately with Major Crocker. You will remain here, and attach yourself to the command of Captain Pacheco, who will march at daybreak for Realejo. Do not forget that the campaign has practically begun, so that it will be necessary to be on the alert."

He shook me kindly by the hand and strode off to his

quarters, while I hastened to rejoin my newly-formed acquaintances.

Captain Pacheco I discovered to be a young man about five years my senior. He had just received his marching orders, and expressed himself delighted at having me for a companion.

"You are weary, lieutenant," he observed considerately, "and I have yet many matters to arrange. Come with me and I will find you a bed; a few hours' sleep will do you good."

I was indeed feeling frightfully fatigued, and my head scarcely touched the pillow before I was fast asleep; neither did I waken until my new friend shook me energetically by the shoulders, informing me that in half an hour the soldiers would march. Springing up hastily, I washed and dressed, by which time Pacheco's attendant had prepared an appetizing meal, to which we both did ample justice. As we finished the last cup of coffee, the door opened and several of Pacheco's brother-officers entered to bid him farewell.

Every one, including ourselves, was entirely ignorant of the real nature of the expedition upon which we were engaged, Pacheco's orders being simply to report himself to Colonel Walker at Realejo without delay, and to place himself under his command.

The men, about one hundred strong, were drawn up in the courtyard, and as we placed ourselves at their head and prepared to march, a loud *Viva!* broke from the assembled officers.

The day had scarcely dawned, and the city lay buried in sleep. Nothing but the tramp, tramp of our marching column broke the silence, save occasionally the sharp cry of a solitary sentinel who momentarily challenged our advance, and then, presenting arms as we swept by, bade us God-speed.

Once outside the town the captain relaxed his discipline, and the men beguiled the tedium of the journey with jokes and laughter and snatches of merry songs.

For some distance we continued along the highroad which I had recently traversed; but about six miles from Leon, Pacheco suddenly swerved to the right, and entered what at first appeared to be a dense thicket nearly impassable.

As we proceeded, however, I noticed that a fairly good track, capable of accommodating two men abreast, had been formed by the constant passage of men and horses.

"There is no danger," he said, in answer to my inquiry; "the Serviles are far enough away, and this will save the men many weary miles. It is a short cut, which we habitually use, to Realejo."

My colleague was in excellent spirits at the thought of joining the Americans, and plied me with numerous questions concerning our leaders, and the probable object of our journey to Realejo.

"Perhaps," I suggested, "it is intended that we should sail southward and make a forced march to Granada, while General Munoz advances his army from the north."

He shook his head. "We are not strong enough. The

Serviles are out in force at Rivas, and would drive us back pell-mell to the coast."

"Is there no hope of the matter being settled in a friendly way?" I asked. "It is a dreadful idea to me that the inhabitants of the same country should fight against each other in this way."

His bright face clouded. "It is indeed a terrible thing, Señor Foster; to me doubly terrible, for my only brother, whom I love dearly, is in Corral's army at Granada. But the difference between us is too great to be bridged over. Don Jose Estrada, whom the Serviles have chosen as their president, is a good man, and means well in his way, but his policy is to keep the country (as it is) in the hands of a few powerful men. He is extremely afraid of outside influence, and he and his friends would gladly banish every foreigner from the land. We, on our part, welcome them; with their aid we can make our country great and strong and a power in the world. We have many natural advantages, and if we could once establish a firm government, money and men would flow into the republic and develop its resources. At present we do nothing but cut each other's throats. Thrift is almost unknown amongst us; for what is the use of acquiring property which may be taken away at any time? The soil is so fertile that work is not necessary, and thus deprived of all motive for exertion, our people remain idle and ignorant. No; there is but one remedy, a firm and resolute government; and neither Castellon nor Estrada can establish that without the assistance of the foreigner."

"Are you not afraid that the foreigner, having once made himself master, will wish to retain his power?"

I shall not forget the expression of his face as he turned and looked at me. His dark eyes flashed with passion as he made answer, "You do not know us yet. Rather than that, we would band ourselves with the Costa Ricans, we would welcome even Guardiola, the Tiger of Honduras, with his murdering savages, and drive every cursed alien into the sea. Pardon me, I grow excited; it is inexcusable. Let us talk of something else. In a few minutes we will call a halt and let the men rest. Did I understand that your troops were stationed at the Hacienda Rivina?"

"Yes; the seat of Don Jose Camenza."

"Ah! he is a true patriot, a personal friend of the president. His eldest son is the colonel of my regiment."

Shortly afterwards, having reached a tolerably open space, the men were ordered to halt, a command which they obeyed with great alacrity. Scribbling a note to Colonel Walker, asking for instructions, Pacheco dispatched a messenger with it to the hacienda. This, he assured me, lay at no great distance to our left, if one knew the nearest route.

"It is very fortunate for us that the weather continues so wonderfully fine," he remarked presently. "You have not as yet, I think, experienced a sample of our rainy season."

"No; there has been no rain since our landing."

"Ah! you have a treat in store. But I will not anticipate. Why spoil the pleasure of the present with gloomy

forebodings of the future? The truly wise man is he who seizes upon all the good which comes in his path, and brushes the evil lightly aside. Look at these men; they are perfectly happy. They have forgotten the fatigues of the march already past; and as for the future, why, time enough to consider it when it becomes the present. Your true philosopher, believe me, is always to be found amongst the ignorant and uneducated."

It certainly was a striking scene to which he directed my attention. The open glade—open only in the sense that it was not quite so dense as the surrounding neighbourhood—was dotted with little groups of Nicaraguan soldiers in every conceivable attitude, some sitting, others lounging in an indolent position which one might well believe habitual to them, while others again lay stretched at full length, fast asleep on the tangled undergrowth.

Suddenly, in obedience to Pacheco's signal, the bugle's notes sharp and clear rang out, the men formed in line, and without further delay we recommenced our journey.

"What about the messenger?" I suggested; "will he not return here?"

"No; he will strike our line of march further on; and even if we are to rendezvous at the hacienda, it will be necessary to follow this track for several miles yet. It would be impossible to march my body of men over the route he has taken."

However, we were not to pay a visit to Don Jose's estate, as the messenger returned with a brief note from Colonel Walker directing us to continue our march to the

barracks at New Realejo, whither he would repair in person.

"Depend upon it," exclaimed my companion musingly, as he handed me the paper, "your idea is correct. It is intended that we shall strike a blow at Granada, from the south; though what good the general expects will come from pitting two hundred men against an army I cannot conceive. However, that is not my affair; I have but to obey orders."

Later on we discovered that our supposition was a sound one; for the morning after our arrival at Realejo we received a visit from Colonel Walker, who directed that, after a short rest, the men should be conveyed in the bongoes down to the old port, there to embark on board the *Vesta*, whose captain only awaited our coming in order to weigh anchor.

Whatever doubts might have remained concerning our destination were dispelled on the morning the *Vesta* left the harbour, when a council of the officers was called in the cabin, where the colonel sat with a large map spread out before him.

"Gentlemen," he began, "the campaign is about to commence. In a few days we shall have struck our first, and, I trust, a successful, blow for the freedom of Nicaragua. To us has been assigned the post of greatest danger, and therefore of greatest glory. The enemy, as you are aware, is massed in strength at Granada, with a strong outpost at Rivas. My design is a very simple one. I purpose making the harbour of Brito, which is about two days' march

from Rivas. The enemy are not expecting an attack from that quarter, and are probably living in fancied security. With a little energy and foresight, I reckon we can steal a march to Rivas, seizing the pickets on the way, and capture that place. General Munoz is meanwhile hastening forward overland, and the Serviles will thus be placed between two fires. Captain Pacheco, as a native officer, and therefore acquainted with the country, I shall be pleased to hear your opinion."

The Nicaraguan, to whom I translated these remarks, for he was not well conversant with spoken English, sat playing restlessly with his moustache, and with a gloomy expression on his face.

"It is unfortunate, colonel, to differ from you," he said; "but if you seek my real judgment, I will not disguise the fact that I consider the proposed scheme eminently hazardous and totally impracticable."

"On what grounds?"

"On one alone—that of numbers. We can land at Brito truly; we can march perhaps to Rivas; but our force is altogether too small to capture it. The Serviles are advantageously posted and strongly intrenched. They will outnumber us by probably four to one; they will fight stubbornly; and they have at their back a well-drilled and well-equipped army from which to derive support. If we do not carry the place at the first rush, our position is hopeless. There will be nothing for it but a hurried retreat to the coast, with the loss of many valuable lives, and a re-embarkation on board our ship. I have stated my

opinion freely, colonel; but at the same time I need scarcely add that my sword is at your service whenever and wherever you desire."

"Fairly put; but your main objection will not weigh heavily with us. We are not accustomed to consider the odds against us."

"Still a dead Servile is worth as much as a dead American, and even your bravest men are not proof against a bullet from a Nicaraguan rifle."

I must admit that to me there seemed great force in Pacheco's remarks, but of course I could only stand by and listen, interpreting a phrase here and there which the Nicaraguan did not grasp. To the others his estimation of the dangers to be encountered appeared overrated, and both Kewen, who had received his commission as lieutenant-colonel, and Major Crocker heartily approved of their commander's design.

Captain Pacheco appeared somewhat disconcerted at the tone of the discussion; but it was not until the next day, when we were pacing the deck together, that I began to understand the reason of his gloomy looks.

We had been reviewing the plan of campaign as unfolded by the colonel, and I was endeavouring to show how it might possibly be carried to a successful termination, when he exclaimed abruptly, "It's no use, Foster; I tell you the enterprise is doomed. Do your people think they are going to fight against children? You Americans may be very brave—I for one do not doubt it—but my countrymen are no cowards to run away at the first shot. If Colonel

Walker fancies the Servile army will melt away at the sight of a few Americans, he is very much deceived."

What a glorious thing is the love which fills our breasts for our native land! Though opposed to the Serviles, and heartily desirous of their subjection, the young officer did not forget he was a Nicaraguan, and his pride revolted against the assumption that his countrymen could be overthrown by a mere handful of foreign troops, even though every one of the filibusters was a picked man.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST BLOW.

THE weather, which had hitherto remained beautifully fine and clear, now began to show every sign of breaking up. The sky became obscured by dark masses of clouds, the wind increased in force, and the huge waves rolled and tossed with a sullen roar, as though eager to break loose from some restraining leash.

Our position on board the *Vesta*, even before the approach of the storm, had been far from pleasant; now it was positively wretched. The old tub appeared to be absolutely deficient in every requisite for sailing. She pitched and tossed in the most perilous manner; her timbers creaked audibly as each succeeding billow met her; and, to add to our misfortunes, the carpenter reported that she had sprung a leak, and the pumps were in constant requisition.

Fortunately we had nearly arrived at our destination, and though cold and drenched with rain, the men so far forgot their misery as to raise a loud cheer when the pilot turned the vessel's head to the shore.

In a short time he had steered her safely into a little

harbour which sheltered us from the full violence of the tempest raging outside.

Even now the situation was not in any degree enviable, but for the present we were secure from actual danger, and to men who had been in momentary expectation of a watery grave this meant a great deal.

The next morning we took our last meal on board the vessel, which, alas! so many gallant men were doomed never to revisit, and prepared for our long and harassing march over the sodden road to Rivas.

La Falange Americana, headed by the colonel, led the way, followed by Pacheco and his Nicaraguans, who already showed signs of discontent and ill-humour, in spite of all their leader could do to raise their drooping spirits.

The outlook indeed was cheerless and gloomy in the extreme. The sky was curtained with sombre clouds heavy with rain, which fell in torrents; the road was a mere bog covered with a thick muddy paste, through which, ankle-deep, we pushed our way laboriously, with the knowledge that every step brought us nearer to an enemy who outnumbered us in the probable ratio of four to one.

We had proceeded about a mile from the harbour when the colonel ordered me to take a dozen men and push on ahead.

"Do not advance too far," he said; "allow no one to pass you; and should you meet with the enemy in force, fall back as rapidly as possible."

Selecting twelve of the best men, amongst whom I included Trevethik and the Irishman, I set off, delighted at

the thought of holding a real command, although a small one.

The rain still continued to fall in a steady downpour, and the road became nearly impassable; but not a single murmur, not a word of complaint, escaped the men, who trudged patiently along through the soft sticky mud, keeping a sharp look-out for any signs of the enemy.

"Faith, Phil," exclaimed the Irishman with a merry twinkle in his black eyes, "this is a rale illigant christening, me boy; if we had only a wee drop of the crather now to mix with all this water! Sure, it's a terrible waste," and he shot a stream of rain from the brim of his slouched hat.

"It's almost as bad as the retreat from San Vincente, when we scuttled out of Sonora."

"By the way, Trevethik, you have never told me about that expedition to Sonora. I should like to hear of your adventures there; the account must be interesting."

The giant smiled grimly, as though his recollections were not altogether pleasant, but he readily promised a recital of his experiences whenever a favourable opportunity should occur.

It was late that night when, having dispatched a messenger to the colonel, I halted the men at a solitary and deserted hut quite destitute of furniture, and barely capable of accommodating my little party. Still it afforded a protection from the pitiless rain, which had been beating down upon us with a steady persistency during the whole of that wretched day; and thankful for small mercies, we

wrung the water from our outer garments, and proceeded to make ourselves as comfortable as possible.

"Now, Trevethik," I said, as I returned from posting a sentry, "unless you are too fatigued, I should be glad to hear the story of Sonora."

Removing a little black pipe from his mouth, he answered slowly, "Well, lieutenant, if it will interest you, I'll go on, though story-telling is rather out of my line. It was in 'Fifty-three I sailed with Walker to Western Mexico. Our numbers were small, less than fifty all told, but at first everything went well. We captured La Paz with the Mexican governor in it, and Walker was elected president. Meanwhile our friends in California were busy on our behalf, and shortly before Christmas we learned that a fresh body of men, nearly three hundred in number, had arrived in the *Anita*, and had gone into camp at San Vincente. They were a rough lot, 'no-account' men for the most part, with little stomach for fighting or hard work.

"Their arrival was the beginning of our misfortunes. Some of the worst banded together and formed a plot to blow up the powder-magazine, which was placed in the middle of the camp. Luckily a whisper of their intentions reached the colonel's ears, and then for the first time we discovered what manner of man he was who led us. Seizing the ringleaders, he had them tried by court-martial, which sentenced two to instant death, and two others to be publicly whipped and drummed out of camp. It was a dangerous situation, I can assure you; but Walker never flinched, and after the sentences were carried out he had the troops

all mustered, and made them a little speech. 'Boys,' he said, in that quick sharp way he sometimes has, 'I hear that some of you are discontented and wish to get away. There is nothing to prevent you. Fifty good men and true are worth more to me than five hundred cowards. All those who are prepared to follow my fortunes hold up their hands!'

"About forty of the new men responded; the others surlily shouldered their rifles and turned to leave the camp. They had reckoned without Walker, however. His sharp eyes dilated and kindled with a greenish light like that of a bird of prey's, his thin lips shut together like a vice, and before we could even guess at his movement, he sprang forward confronting them. 'Halt!' he cried scornfully. 'Cowards have no need for weapons; stack your arms.'

"I reckoned we were in for a nasty scrimmage. They were two hundred strong—fierce, desperate men—and it looked as though his life was in their hands. But he has absolutely no fear; and though they growled under their breath, they did his bidding. 'Now go,' he said. 'You are not men; you are chickens,' and they skulked off, while we gave them a derisive cheer.

"This defection left us less than a hundred strong, but it mattered little to our leader, who, leaving a score of men at San Vincente, began his march over the mountains toward Sonora. Very soon our sufferings became terrible. Provisions began to fail; several of the men deserted; clouds of Indians hovered round our scanty ranks, killing the wounded and the stragglers, and harassing us with con-

tinual showers of arrows, which did fearful execution owing to our lack of proper surgical appliances. Our clothes were in rags, and, to crown our disasters, we were ravaged by a cruel disease. Every day some one dropped out of the ranks and died; each succeeding morning found fewer men to answer to their names at the roll-call; and at last it was decided that we should turn back.

"If hitherto our misfortunes had been great, now they became overwhelming. The Mexicans, emboldened at the sight of our retreat, never left us night or day. They hung upon our flanks, they harried our rear, they poured a galling fire into the head of our column, disappearing instantly over the mountain sides, to reappear further ahead. Our provisions were almost exhausted, our clothes were tattered fragments, the sharp rocks cut and bruised our naked feet, and the blood flowed from our wounds as we walked.

"In spite of every difficulty, however, we marched steadily forward, and not a murmur arose against our leader. Nothing disheartened him, nothing broke down his indomitable spirit. He fought everywhere, in the front, in the rear; in fact, wherever danger threatened there he was to be found. When a man was struck by an arrow, his was the hand that extracted it, and bound up the gaping wound with the gentleness and care of a woman. Did some poor fellow, wounded and exhausted, drop to the ground, feebly expressing a wish to lie down and die? it was the colonel who lingered by his side, and inspired him with heart of grace to rise and renew the almost hopeless

struggle. It was on the colonel's shoulder the poor wretch leaned as he toiled painfully along; and when, as sometimes happened, the unhappy sufferer succumbed to his fate, it was the colonel's hands that closed the lifeless eyes.

"Once his coolness and courage saved us all from certain destruction. We had entered a gorge, which, though perhaps half a mile wide in the centre, narrowed considerably at either end. A body of Mexicans hung closely upon our rear, and closed the entrance after we had passed through. This of course we expected, but on reaching the middle we found to our dismay a crowd of Indians in our front. Instinctively each man realized the fatal truth—we were in a death-trap. Even then our leader showed no sign of despondency. Hastily throwing a dozen men into a thicket, he coolly marched the remainder of us back toward the entrance. The Indians came on with a wild yell and savage cries of exultation; but as they passed the ambush a sharp report rang out, and twelve of them fell lifeless to the ground. At the same instant we once more faced about, and poured in a second volley, which completed their discomfiture. Before they recovered from their confusion we charged solidly through them, and traversed the dangerous defile. The rest is soon told. Frightened by this repulse, the enemy kept at a respectful distance during the rest of the march; and on May 8, 1854, we recrossed the boundary into the United States. But the night grows late, and as we shall have to start by daybreak, we had better get a little rest."

Replacing his pipe in his pocket he doubled up his arm

for a pillow, and in a few moments was sound asleep, an example which I hastened to follow.

The next day's march was but a repetition of our former troubles. The rain descended in a steady flood, chilling us to the bone, and the mud rendered our progress slow and difficult. The country around appeared deserted, and it was not until nightfall that we caught our first glimpse of the enemy.

We were approaching a moderately-sized village, and, impressed with the necessity for caution, I stole noiselessly forward accompanied by Trevethik, leaving the rest under the command of the Irishman.

Everything was wrapped in profound darkness, and this rendered our design comparatively easy, since we were enabled to creep unperceived to the very entrance of the village.

Suddenly we heard the challenge of a sentinel, and Trevethik, laying his hand lightly upon my arm, drew me silently behind a large tree. Again the *alerte* of the watchful sentry broke the stillness, and was repeated from a further distance.

The man was scarcely more than two yards away, and we could distinctly hear him muttering to himself. "It must have been an animal," he said presently, "or the falling of a bough. *Quien sabe?*" Satisfied that his alarm had been groundless, he recommenced his dreary pacing to and fro, while we fell back with the utmost stealth from our dangerous position.

Sending Brogan to the rear with the news of our dis-

covery, I placed my little troop under the shelter of the trees, and waited until the main body could come up, which they did in a much shorter time than I had ventured to hope.

The colonel listened to my report. "Major Crocker," he said, "the enemy have no doubt established a picket in the village. Take Lieutenant Foster with twenty men and work your way without noise to the other side. It is necessary that every one of the Serviles should fall into our hands."

The major saluted, and while Walker proceeded with his instructions to the other officers we silently filed off with the intention of making a wide detour to the right, and thus placing ourselves between the enemy and Rivas.

By this time the inhabitants of the village were wrapped in slumber. A few lights burned here and there, but no sound was heard save the monotonous tramp of the weary sentinels, who, all unconscious of their imminent danger, paced to and fro.

At length all was ready, and at a given signal a simultaneous rush from every side was made upon the unsuspecting foe. The movement was a complete success. Surprised and overpowered by numbers, the Serviles offered no resistance, and within a very brief space the village was in our possession, and a new cordon of sentries drawn around.

This trifling success, added to the comfortable quarters in which we now found ourselves, put every one in good-humour; and when the morning broke fine and dry, the

men forgot their previous miseries, and moved out from Tola in the highest spirits.

For myself, the charming beauty of the scene so engrossed my attention, that for a time I actually forgot the reason of our presence there. Before us lay Lake Nicaragua, a magnificent sheet of water some thirty miles broad, its placid bosom studded with islets, from several of which towered huge volcanic peaks standing like monstrous sentinels. Young as I was, I had already beheld some of the grandest scenery in the North, and since then I have grown familiar with the beauties of the European continent; but nothing has ever succeeded in effacing the impressions produced by my first sight of the Nicaraguan lake.

There was little time, however, for indulging in poetic sentiment. Between us and the lake stood the important town of Rivas, where six hundred Serviles under General Boscha awaited our attack.

Stern work was in front of us, and my heart beat fast as we took up our position. The plan of attack was simplicity itself. The Falange, led by Kewen and Crocker, was to push the Serviles back into the town, while Pacheco held his men in readiness to convert the retreat into a rout.

"Shoulder to shoulder, boys," exclaimed Walker. "Reserve your fire until you get to close quarters, and do not waste a bullet."

Silently and in perfect order our little party moved down toward the Serviles, who, lining the narrow streets, were prepared to offer us a warm reception.

"The gintlemen are in a mighty hurry entoirely," said

Brogan, as a volley of bullets fell just short of the head of our column. "Phil, me boy, these beggars mean business."

Trevethik nodded, and as if in confirmation of the Irishman's statement, another volley, which wounded one man, fell this time in our midst. Still our order remained unbroken, and we continued steadily to advance without noticing the enemy's polite attentions, though each man grasped his rifle more firmly.

At length we arrived within short range, and Kewen gave the order to fire. "Aim low, boys, and then give them a taste of cold steel."

Like one man our little body raised their rifles and poured in a deadly volley; then, without waiting for the smoke to clear away we rushed on with a yell of defiance. It was a maddening moment. We did not pause to consider the danger, but pushed on through the tortuous streets, driving the flying enemy before us until we reached the plaza.

Here for the first time we turned, and a cry of rage broke from the Falange. Our allies, whom we believed to be close behind, had never moved from their position. We could see Pacheco gesticulating wildly, waving his sword toward us and apparently appealing to them, and threatening alternately, but to no purpose. For another moment they stood irresolute; then a perceptible shiver passed through them, like branches of forest trees swayed by the wind; and the next instant the whole force of our reserves, with the single exception of their gallant leader, was in full retreat.

Our position had now become critical in the extreme. We had driven the enemy to the plaza, but beyond this our most desperate efforts could not force them. Each succeeding moment, too, told against us. The Serviles, who greeted the flight of our allies with shouts of derision, fought with the most stubborn courage, and became in their turn the assailants.

In vain we fired at the advancing horde with fatal precision; for every man that dropped, another pressed eagerly forward, and our little band grew steadily less and less.

Major Crocker, fighting like a madman, was already wounded in two places, and suddenly I saw his right arm, broken by a musket ball, fall heavily to his side. Still he scorned to yield, and shifting his revolver to his left hand, he stood with head erect and flashing eyes firing at the foe, until a bullet crashed through his brain, and the gallant fellow had fought his last fight.

The colonel, who, true to his character, was in the thickest of the fray, now directed us to retreat to a row of adobe huts, whose mud-built walls would afford some protection against the enemy's overwhelming fire.

Still with our faces to the foe, we fell back in a leisurely manner, the Serviles following like dogs on the track of the quarry; and here I noticed to my delight that we had been joined by Pacheco. Disgusted at the cowardice of his troops, this true-hearted soldier, perceiving our deadly peril, had rushed unattended to our aid, willing rather to perish with us than live dishonoured by the action of his countrymen.

By this time my brain seemed on fire, my throat was parched, and I was conscious of a dull aching pain in my left leg. However, there was little opportunity for reflection. The enemy, believing us to be trapped, came on with piercing cries, only to fall back in disorder before the short, sharp volley poured in by the Falange.

Again and again they returned undauntedly to the attack; and though their losses must have been enormous compared with ours, yet even to me it was clear that only a question of time stood between us and destruction.

We had left Crocker in the plaza, his body riddled with bullets, and now Kewen fell with a musket ball through his heart. I glanced at the colonel. His features were calm and unruffled as a mask, but the grey eyes gleamed and the thin upper lip was tightly compressed. He seemed to bear a charmed life; wherever danger threatened there he was, cheering his men, urging them to renewed exertions, and repelling every fresh attack with a steady coolness that extorted the admiration of friends and foes alike.

Inspired by his courage, no one spoke of yielding or surrender, but all continued to fight with a sort of hopeless despair. For several hours the combat lasted almost without pause, when, as if tired by their exertions, the Serviles withdrew a short distance, giving us a little breathing-space.

"Boys," exclaimed the colonel, glancing compassionately at our little group of dead, "this cannot last. There is but one course left; we must cut our way through."

A mighty cheer—a cheer which made the enemy glance toward us in astonishment—went up from the reckless men,

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Trevethik raised me gently (p. 65)

and grasping their pistols firmly they made ready for a bold dash. It was a desperate venture, but, as the colonel rightly said, it was our sole chance.

Every moment rendered our present position more dangerous. Many of our men had already fallen, and the rest, weakened by loss of blood—for every man was wounded—and want of food, became more and more unequal to continuing the savage combat.

For myself, the pain in my leg was growing intolerable, blood flowed into my eyes from a nasty gash in the head, and I ached in every limb. As the men gathered for the final rush, I strove to join them; but the effort was too great, and with a cry of despair I sank helpless on the ground.

Luckily the brave-hearted Trevethik recognized my voice, and turning back raised me gently in his brawny arms. "Poor lad," I heard him mutter, "we must not leave him here for those blood-thirsty niggers. Brogan, put him on my back; he's no light weight, but it shall never be said that Phil Trevethik left his officer to be tortured by savages."

I tried to utter my thanks, but my throat was too parched, I could only squeeze his hand feebly; then my eyes closed, my head fell forward, and I remembered nothing further.

CHAPTER V.

THE RETREAT FROM RIVAS.

WHEN I recovered consciousness it was night-time, and I was lying in a sort of *al-fresco* hut formed of a few stakes and thatched with enormous palm-leaves, hastily constructed for my comfort, as I afterwards learned, by Pacheco, who had come safely out of the terrible fray.

Round about gleamed the lights of the watch-fires, and I could distinguish the dusky forms of our men as they lay asleep, thoroughly worn out and exhausted.

Presently the sound of a familiar voice reached me, and, looking up, I recognized the Irishman peering into my face.

"Arrah, then, liftenant, may the saints be praised!" he exclaimed joyously. "The colonel will be plazed when he learns that the rascally Dons haven't kilt ye entoirely. Ye may thank him and Trevethik that ye aren't opening your eyes in the next world. That captain, too, anybody would think, to watch his capers, that ye were his own twin brother."

"Where are we?" I asked; "what has happened?"

"Faith, then, it's meself that can't answer the first ques-

tion, except that we are on our way to the coast; but the second part is easily told. When the colonel gave the word, we rushed out from behind the walls, yourself on Trevethik's back, with the friendly Don and me one on each side to prevent the enemy from coming too close. They had had their fill of fighting for one day, however, and did not try to stop us, so we jogged along quite comfortably.

"Presently Walker casts his eyes round, and says quite sharply, 'Trevethik, who is that ye are carrying?' 'Mr. Foster, sir,' says Trevethik; 'and I am afraid the poor boy is little better than a corpse.' With that the colonel says, 'Put him down there. Where's he hit, I wonder? Ah! cut across the head—that doesn't amount to much. Oh, here's the mischief—bullet in the left leg; we'll soon have that out.' 'That's plunder,' says I, 'that the young rascal has been filching from the Serviles, and hiding in a safe place.' The boys laughed, but Walker gave me one of his pretty looks, and turned me into a dumb baste. Then he knelt down, and with a little instrument, just for all the world as though he were a rale doctor, began to search for the uncivil bullet, which, sure enough, was snug and comfortable in your leg. Then he put some powerful-smelling stuff into the hole, bound it up with his handkerchief, and said to Phil, 'Now, Trevethik, my man, we'll carry him turn and turn about, for ye must be getting tired.' When we halted, your friend the captain with the heathenish name made this illigant bower, and—but what's that?" as a lurid flame of light shot up into the eastern sky.

"It seems to come from the direction of Rivas," I suggested.

"That's it; the beggars are making a bonfire to celebrate our retreat. Won't the colonel be in a pleasant humour when he sees it!"

It was certainly very annoying to think that our foes were thus making merry over our defeat; but fortunately we did not then know what was actually taking place in the little plaza we had fought so stoutly to maintain.

Had we guessed the truth; had we suspected that the cowardly Serviles, in their savage attempt to wreak a pitiful vengeance for their heavy losses, were feeding their bonfire with our beloved dead; had we known that the bodies of the valiant Crocker, the sturdy Kewen, and the remainder of our fallen comrades, were being committed to the flames, I verily believe that, in spite of fatigue and wounds, and the almost certainty of a terrible death, every man in the Falange would have retraced his steps to Rivas.

Presently the Irishman took his departure, and I was just dozing off, when the colonel himself appeared. "Well, Colin," he said in his kindly way, "how do you find yourself now? Is the wound still painful?"

"I scarcely feel it at present, thanks principally to your kindness. Believe me, sir, I am deeply grateful; I shall never forget that you have saved my life."

"Nonsense! even had I done what you imagine, it would have been merely cancelling the debt I owe you. But your thanks are really due to Trevethik. I congratulate you on having secured his friendship; he is a splendid fellow."

"He is indeed," I answered warmly. "He and Brogan are friends worth having."

After chatting for a few minutes longer, he bade me Good-night; and watching him walk slowly away, I knew that, in spite of his stern features, his heart was heavy with grief for the loss of the gallant men who would follow his flag no more.

The grey dawn had scarcely heralded the approach of morning when, feeling a hand laid lightly on my shoulder, I opened my eyes sleepily and beheld Trevethik.

His honest face glowed with genuine pleasure, and he grasped my proffered hand cordially. "We march in half an hour," he said. "Dennis is cooking you a bit of breakfast, though the bill of fare is far from a lengthy one, and consists chiefly of a can of hot coffee; but that will be better than nothing. I don't exactly know whither we are bound, but Dennis and I have fitted up a comfortable stretcher, so that you shall suffer as little pain from your wound as possible."

While he was speaking I could hardly keep the tears from my eyes, his kindness touched me so deeply. What had I done to deserve such affectionate devotion from this strong, rugged man? Why should he peril his life to save mine, and afterwards watch over and tend me with the eager solicitude of a loving parent?

I put the question to him once when I had learned to know him better, and his answer seemed so strange to me that I have never since forgotten it.

"Well, Mr. Foster," he said slowly, "in the first place

it was easy to see you were a gentleman, and you treated me as if I was one. You spoke to me hearty and pleasant like, just in the same way as you talked to the colonel; and you didn't try to make me feel that though I might be a very good sort of man in my way, I wasn't made of the same clay as yourself. Now some gentlefolk as mean to be very kind always make that mistake. They think we ought to be grateful because they take notice of us, and pat us on the head, so to speak; but depend upon it no true man likes that kind of thing. They should either let us alone, or meet us on equal ground. Now you are genuine. You would not be ashamed to take my hand in face of all your friends and say, 'Gentlemen, this is my old friend Philip Trevethik,' and every one would know you really meant it."

Often since then have his words given me food for serious reflection, and I am convinced of the deep truth underlying his remarks; but this is not the place for an essay, so I will return to my story.

I tried to thank him for all his kindness; but he would not listen, saying he had done no more than Brogan and Pacheco, and not so much as the colonel.

"By the way, where is Pacheco?" I asked; "he has not been to see me."

"No; after erecting this shelter he left the camp, and has not since returned. He is most likely hunting up his men. Poor fellow! their cowardly conduct has depressed him terribly, though no one blames him. The colonel indeed thanked him publicly for his pluck in

coming to our assistance.—But here is Dennis with the coffee."

"Phil, me boy," exclaimed the warm-hearted Irishman, "unless ye mane to go exploring on an empty stomach, ye'd better hurry; I'll see to the liftenant. I've had my breakfast, praise the saints! and faith they can't accuse Dennis Brogan of gluttony this very morning," finishing with a comical grimace at the recollection of its scanty proportions.

"Mr. Foster, if ye'd only got a strong imagination now, and would shut your eyes, ye might have a lovely banquet, like the man in the book I once heard about. I could say, 'Shall I pass you a leg or a wing of this chicken, Mr. Foster? or maybe ye'd like a bit of the breast. Ye might try a little of this pigeon-pie, the birds are very tender and the crust is beautiful and flaky.' By the powers, it makes me mouth water! 'Dry sherry, sir, or madeira?' Faith, it's a mighty convanient way of procuring a good meal at very little expense!"

In spite of my weakness, I could not resist laughing at the Irishman's comical conceit, though, truth to tell, I should not have been sorry had there been a little more reality in the performance. However, there was not much time in which to indulge in lamentation, for presently the bugles sounded, and hastily abandoning the camp-fires the men prepared to march.

Meanwhile Trevethik and the Irishman had brought their improvised stretcher, and placing me carefully upon it, took their places in the centre of the Falange, where I discovered a similar conveyance to my own.

"That is Captain Doubleday," Trevethik whispered, following the direction of my eyes, "shot through the head. The wound would have killed any other man; but he has more lives than the proverbial cat, and no one doubts his recovery,"—a prediction which later events fully justified.

To any one unacquainted with the facts of the case, our little body of troops that day must have presented a singular appearance. Many of the men were without hats, some even were destitute of shoes, all were dusty and smoke-begrimed. Every other man appeared with a bandage more or less clumsy, hiding in many cases a gaping wound, and as they toiled painfully onward the track was stained with blood.

Grievous, however, as was the plight of the Falange, there was no sign of murmuring or complaint. The men marched doggedly onward, prepared to receive the attack of the enemy. The Serviles, however, did not venture to pursue us. The enormous losses they had sustained at our hands on the previous day had completely discouraged them, and they were content to remain in possession of the post from which we had vainly attempted to dislodge them.

Once or twice during the tedious journey Colonel Walker came to my side for a few minutes' conversation. He informed me that we were marching on San Juan, a seaport town to the south of Brito, and that he anticipated reaching it by eventide.

"For the present," he remarked, "the campaign is over;

our attempt has failed, and under the circumstances it would be folly to remain here. We shall re-embark on the *Vesta*, and return to Realejo."

On our arrival at San Juan the old brig was nowhere in sight; but finding a Costa Rican schooner in the harbour, the colonel gave orders that she should be seized and made ready for the accommodation of the troops.

Meantime my faithful attendants carried me to the barracks, and having made everything comfortable as far as lay in their power, returned to their duties.

Poor Doubleday lay in the next bed to mine, affording me a kind of melancholy companionship. Though no longer insensible, he could not speak; his head was swathed in bandages; and from the nature of his wounds he must have suffered an agony of pain. Now and again he gave utterance to a low groan, but for the most part he lay quite still, sternly repressing any signs of the torture which was racking him.

The barracks being situated near the shore, I could distinctly hear the noise of the men as they passed to and fro, and the occasional exclamations of the natives who had been attracted by the novel sight.

Gradually a sense of drowsiness stole over me and I fell into an uneasy slumber, from which I was awakened by a strong smell of burning. I glanced hastily at Doubleday, who was wide awake and conscious of our perilous situation.

"Captain," I cried excitedly, "the barracks are on fire!" and he made a feeble gesture of assent.

Outside we could hear the tramp of many feet mingled with the voices of the spectators, and presently across the narrow grated window shot a forked flame of light. The room grew hot and stifling; every moment lessened our chances of escape, and still no one came to the rescue.

I shouted aloud, nay, let me confess truly, I screamed the names of Trevethik and Brogan, till at length, maddened at the horrible prospect of being roasted to death, I crawled from the bed and made a desperate endeavour to reach the door.

Doubleday's eyes followed me with a plaintive expression as I toiled painfully along. I gave him a reassuring glance which apparently satisfied him; but my suffering was so intense, that before a quarter of the distance had been traversed I knew my design would fail.

"It is all over," I cried to my fellow victim; "I can do no more." Then strangely enough all my anxiety vanished, my spirits became calm, and I lay quietly awaiting the end.

Suddenly the door was burst open, and I recognized with a sense of the liveliest joy half a dozen of the Falange, headed by Trevethik and the Irishman.

"Do not forget the captain," I exclaimed, as they raised me from the ground.

After that I must have fainted, for I remember nothing more until I awoke in my old quarters on board the *Vesta,* and knew from the rolling motion of the vessel that we were once more at sea.

Trevethik, who had requested permission to wait upon

me, was sitting in the little cabin, and seeing my eyes open, came forward.

"You have had a good long spell, Mr. Foster," he said pleasantly, "and look all the better for it. No questions, sir—at least until after you have taken some nourishment. I will be back shortly. I am going to the cook for some broth;—the colonel's orders, you know, and he does not like his commands disobeyed."

Very soon he reappeared with a basin of hot, delicious broth and a spoon, with which he gravely proceeded to feed me; for I found myself even weaker than on the retreat from Rivas, though my head was clear and I felt in capital spirits.

"Now, Philip," I exclaimed, "tell me what has occurred. I judge we are on board the *Vesta* and at sea, but there are one or two little matters I cannot exactly understand. What, for instance, caused the fire at the barracks?"

His frank, open face grew cold and stern at my question, and he replied with reluctance, "It was a shameful business, Mr. Foster; the barracks were fired of set purpose."

"By our men?" I cried. "Impossible!"

"No; it was not quite so bad as that, though the actual miscreants were Americans. But if you get so excited, the colonel will call me a bad nurse and send me about my business. He is on deck at present, but he frequently comes to have a look at you."

Having received my assurances to remain very quiet, Trevethik continued: "You remember that not finding

the *Vesta* at San Juan, the colonel ordered a Costa Rican schooner to be seized, and preparations at once made for our embarkation. In the midst of the bustle a cry was raised that the barracks were in flames, and on reaching the buildings we found that they must have been burning for some time. Our first thought, of course, was of you and Captain Doubleday, whom we luckily were able to rescue. The fire meanwhile, fanned by a steady wind from the sea, was fast spreading, and had not our men worked with might and main, the whole town must have been burned down. As it was, we only just managed to save the place from destruction. I told you in the beginning that the mischief was caused by two Americans. They were men of notoriously evil characters, and had lived in San Juan for some considerable time. What their motive could have been it would be hard to tell, but either from sheer wickedness, or possibly with the hope of obtaining plunder during the confusion, they set fire to the barracks in several different places.

"You may easily imagine that the colonel was furious when he became acquainted with the real facts. A party was instantly told off to effect the capture of the incendiaries; but one of them got away, and the other, accompanied by a native woman, took refuge in the boat lying at the stern of the schooner.

"He was a cool scoundrel, and gave us a lot of trouble. We were afraid to fire at him because of the woman, and he himself had the reputation of being a dead shot. However, the colonel was determined he should not escape, so

all through the night we kept watch over the boat. In the morning the *San José* weighed anchor, which we knew must settle the case one way or other. Either he must remain passive, and allow his boat to be towed out to sea, in which case he would be at our mercy; or he must expose himself to our aim in endeavouring to cut the painter. He chose the latter alternative. Making a shield of the woman's body, he moved cautiously toward the bow of the boat. It was an anxious moment both for him and for us. Suddenly he shifted his position, bringing his body for a brief instant into view. The time could not have exceeded the fraction of a second, but it was sufficient. Dennis, who stood next to me, saw his opportunity. There was a flash, a sharp report, and throwing up his arms with a cry of despair the unhappy wretch fell dead. It was a stern punishment; but he had committed a great crime, and had himself alone to blame. The day after leaving San Juan we encountered the *Vesta*, and changed our quarters."

"But how is it I remember nothing of these events?" I asked.

"That is easily accounted for. When we carried you on board the schooner you were insensible, and during the night became delirious; the excitement of the fire in your weakened state proved, I expect, too much for your brain. But I must not let you talk any longer."

"Just one more question—how is poor Captain Doubleday?"

"Progressing nicely; he will soon be fit for duty again."

The effort of conversation had by this time fatigued me, and though unwilling to lose Philip's society, I was yet glad to close my eyes and doze off into a quiet sleep.

Nothing occurred during the remainder of the voyage worth chronicling. My wound gradually healed, but I did not recover sufficient strength to leave the cabin; and when we reached Realejo my weakness was still so great, that the colonel procured a carriage for my removal to Leon.

Here I experienced a pleasant surprise. Instead of following the direction taken by the Falange, the coachman turned to the right, and after traversing several of the principal streets, which were crowded with Leonese hurrying to catch a glimpse of the formidable foreigners, drove into the courtyard of a handsome house.

"You must have made a mistake," I exclaimed in Spanish, as, descending from the box, he approached the door of the vehicle; "why have you brought me here?"

"It was my master's command, señor," he answered stolidly.

"My good fellow," I said, I fear a trifle testily, "I do not know your master; I am an American."

The old fellow shrugged his shoulders and elevated his eyebrows, as though he were an actor in a pantomime.

"Ah!" he said, "the Americans are a curious people; they have strange ways hard for us to understand. But the señor is keeping the ladies waiting; they have heard the carriage; and see—here are the servants who will assist the señor to alight."

I did see, and began seriously to consider if I were not suffering from a second attack of delirium. The hall door was open, and a group of liveried servants stood on the step waiting for the conclusion of my conversation with the driver.

"For heaven's sake, man," I cried in desperation, "tell me your master's name."

"The señor is jesting," he replied in unruffled tones; "surely he has no need to ask the name of Don Miguel Pacheco!"

I hesitated no longer. The sound of the name uttered by the old servant brought back to my mind the recollection of the young Nicaraguan, who had behaved with such conspicuous gallantry at Rivas. I had not seen him since, but I looked forward with eagerness to meeting him.

One of the servants, a tall, portly man of grave demeanour, now came forward, and making a profound bow begged to know if he should assist me to alight. I accepted his aid willingly, for my steps were feeble and uncertain.

My companion gazed at me attentively. "The master was right," he murmured with an air of kindly pity; "you are indeed young to have suffered so much."

"Is your master at home?" I asked.

"No, he cannot leave his post at present; but he has sent orders that you are to be treated as one of the family. I heard my mistress say he had made arrangements with your general that you were to be his guest."

I glanced ruefully at my soiled clothing and generally disordered appearance.

"The señor need not distress himself; Don Miguel has thought of that, and has placed his wardrobe at the señor's service," said the old servant cheerfully, interpreting aright the dolorous expression of my countenance.

This was good news, for my dress was in a tattered condition, and I had not even a change of linen.

Still leaning on the arm of my conductor, I entered the house, and was ushered into a tastefully-furnished apartment, which had been converted into a sleeping-room for me. After setting out a complete suit of Don Miguel's clothes, the domestic left me to arrange my toilet, telling me that dinner would be served in a short time, after which Don Miguel's mother and sister would be happy to make my acquaintance.

This was certainly a very agreeable change in my fortunes. I felt that I could not be sufficiently grateful to my kind friend for his thoughtful generosity.

Indeed, looking back on the last few months in my life, I was struck with wonder at the many marks of kindness which had been shown me, by those who were little more than strangers, and for whom, except perhaps in the case of the colonel, I had done nothing.

Here my reverie was broken in upon by the entrance of the servant, with the information that dinner was ready, which, as I had eaten nothing for several hours, was a very welcome intimation.

CHAPTER VI.

A PLEASANT INTERLUDE.

AFTER a sumptuous repast, my attendant led me to a large handsome apartment, where two ladies waited to receive me. The elder I knew intuitively to be Don Pacheco's mother, but who the other was I did not so readily guess.

She resembled neither my absent host nor his mother. Instead of being dark, with black eyes and hair, she had a fair, almost pink and white, complexion, and her eyes were blue. She was quite young, being apparently twelve months my junior.

As I limped into the room there stole into her eyes a sweet pitying smile that drew me to her as though she had been my own sister.

They were very kind to me, those two ladies; they could not have treated me with a more tender care had I been Don Miguel himself. They would not allow me to finish my halting expression of thanks, but led me to an easy chair, and the young girl fetched a kind of hassock for the purpose of resting my wounded leg.

"You will pardon our having left you to the care of our

servants, will you not?" said my hostess sweetly; "we thought—my daughter and I—that it would be better to postpone our introduction until after you had refreshed yourself."

"Truly," I answered, "it is I who should crave pardon for causing you such trouble, I, who am an utter stranger."

"Are you not my son's friend?" she asked, "and is not that sufficient? Indeed," she continued, "for your own sake, I am glad you are under our roof; you are far too young to be mixed up in these terrible doings."

She spoke so feelingly and with such sincerity that I could not refrain from telling her the story of my life. As I spoke, first of my mother's death, and afterwards of the loss of my father, tears came into her eyes; and though the young girl had turned her head aside, I knew that she too was weeping.

"Poor boy," exclaimed the elder lady pityingly, as I finished my sad tale, "you are indeed to be pitied, so young and alone in the world. You must keep a brave heart; the good God will not forsake you," and she crossed herself reverently.

We were all silent for a few moments after this, and then I asked when they expected to see Don Miguel.

"We scarcely know. He has sent to say that he will come as soon as he can obtain leave of absence; perhaps he will be with us to-morrow."

I expressed my satisfaction at this news, and then the young girl—whose name, by the way, I have omitted to

mention was Inez—sang in a clear sweet voice some pretty Spanish songs, accompanying herself on a guitar.

It was very pleasant to sit with half-closed eyes, leaning back in my comfortable chair, listening to these gentle strains of music, and I was quite sorry when the time came for our little party to break up for the night.

Three or four days slipped happily by, and all this time Doña Inez and her mother treated me with the utmost kindness. They sent for their own physician, who dressed my wound with considerable skill. Moreover, he prophesied a speedy cure, at which I was much pleased. All the servants, too, seemed to have been placed at my disposal, and I had but to express any wish for it to be immediately gratified.

Of what was happening in the town I remained ignorant, but the colonel sent a kind note bidding me remain quietly in my present quarters until completely fit for duty again.

My visit had lasted nearly a week, when one morning, while seated in the room which had been set apart for my use, a servant announced Don Miguel Pacheco. I rose with difficulty, and the next moment we were grasping each other's hand like old friends.

He inquired about the injured limb, and expressed himself delighted with my rapid progress toward recovery.

After the gloss of the first excitement had worn off, however, I noticed that his face looked gloomy, and that there was a touch of despondency in his voice as he evaded rather than answered my questions.

"Come, captain," I said presently, "you do not give me

much information; remember I am dependent upon you for all the news. What is going on? What have our men been doing since their return from Rivas?"

It was the first time that the subject of our unlucky repulse had been alluded to between us, and his face flushed crimson.

"There is little to tell," he answered moodily, "and unfortunately that little is evil rather than good. The Serviles are advancing steadily from Granada; their allies in Honduras are massing in the north. As if that were not sufficient, it is rumoured that the Costa Ricans have pledged themselves to place an army in the field against us."

"But our side, captain! what are our men doing? They are not sitting with their arms folded, I presume, waiting patiently to be overwhelmed."

He smiled at my speech, but it was rather a melancholy performance. Presently he said bitterly, "That proceeding would be foolish enough, but, as a matter of fact, we are committing a greater folly still. With resolute, determined foes springing up on every side, we are employing our energies in quarrelling amongst ourselves."

This was truly sorry comfort, and I no longer wondered at the gravity of his countenance.

"It was a mistake from the beginning," he continued; "we should have refused all outside aid, and fought our own battles single-handed."

"Why should they quarrel?" I asked; "what is the grievance?"

"It is the old story," he answered; "jealousy and dis-

trust. I do not quite understand what has happened in the higher ranks, but it appears that your colonel has made some demand which the president cannot or will not sanction. However, let us not dwell upon this gloomy subject; I have but a few hours' leave. If you do not object, we will join my mother and sister. Come, lean upon my arm."

By the time we came into the presence of the ladies Don Miguel had banished his sombre air, and during the remainder of the day was the life and soul of the little party. All talk of the terrible war and the fast-gathering troubles which menaced his unhappy country was put away, and he laughed and jested as though untroubled by a single care.

We were all very sorry when the time came for him to leave; but he bade us keep up our spirits, promising, if possible, to return in a day or two.

I did not see much more of my hostess and her daughter that night. They retired early, on the plea of fatigue, though I rather fancy the real reason was to hide the signs of the grief which Don Miguel's departure caused them.

The following morning brought another visitor whom I was heartily glad to see. The day was beautifully fine, and, my leg being much easier, I had hobbled out into the magnificent garden, accompanied by Inez. She had just seated herself in a pleasant bower, and I was preparing to imitate her example, when, turning my head casually, I caught sight of Trevethik.

His eyes brightened as they met mine, and he came on hastily. Observing the beautiful girl at my side, however,

he paused, and removed his slouch-hat with a natural courtesy which charmed Inez.

"Who is he?" she whispered; "he is a monster, a giant such as one reads about in the story-books. Still," she added thoughtfully, "I am sure he is a good-natured giant, for he has a very pleasant face."

"You are right," I answered; "he is a very honest man, and I owe him a deep debt of gratitude. He it was who saved my life in the terrible fight at Rivas."

She clapped her pretty hands. "Oh, yes, I remember," she cried. "He placed you on his back and carried you out of danger. Let him come up. Ah! I wish I could speak your English! Tell him he is a brave man, and that I like brave men."

"Phil," I said, in obedience to her order, "this lady is Captain Pacheco's sister. I have been telling her what you did for me at Rivas, and she wishes me to compliment you upon your gallant action."

The poor fellow's face flushed a rosy red, and he bowed awkwardly to Inez. "I am very much obliged to you, miss," he said, "but I only did my duty, and any man who is worth the name will do that. As to being brave, why, the Don did as much as I did. You must be very fond of your brother, I should say, if you like brave men."

I thought this was a neat speech coming from Phil, and faithfully interpreted it to Inez, whose dancing eyes and happy face showed how much it pleased her.

Presently she said in her pretty way, "Now I will go while you transact the business which has brought your

countryman here. When it is finished, bring him to the house; he will need some refreshment before returning."

She smiled an adieu to Philip, and as she disappeared we heard the fresh young voice break out into a merry song.

After she had gone, Trevethik looked around him with much curiosity. "Well, Mr. Foster," he said slowly, "this is a very pleasant way of carrying on the campaign. I only hope the colonel hasn't sent you your marching orders, for this must be a very comfortable billet."

"It is," I laughed, "very comfortable indeed—much more to my taste than the road to Rivas. The young lady and her mother treat me as though I were one of them. If ever we have a chance of doing a good turn for the captain, we must not forget it; it is all owing to him."

"He is a good chap, that captain," mused Phil reflectively, as though a trifle astonished at finding anything praiseworthy in a foreigner; "I liked him before, I shall like him better in the future. But," he added hastily, "I must not forget my orders," and he drew a letter from his belt. "This is from the colonel; it does not require an answer, but he charged me strictly to inquire if you were recovering from your wound."

"Luckily that is easily answered. The wound has closed, and I can walk without assistance. I shall soon be able to report myself fit for duty, though, if what the captain tells me is correct, there is very little to be done at present."

"No; I can't understand the colonel's game at all, keeping us cooped up here when by all accounts there's plenty of work stirring; but our turn will come."

For some time longer we sat chatting, and then I took him to the house. Here the cook, in obedience to the orders of her young mistress, had prepared a splendid collation; and, as he was going away, Inez herself came to pour him out a glass of wine and to bid him God-speed on his journey.

It made me very glad to see how she was taken with him. He was a noble-hearted man, and I was beginning to love him in much the same way that I had loved my father. In many respects he resembled my father, only he lacked the latter's education. He was kind-hearted and true as steel, brave and loyal to the core. I really believe he had not one single vice belonging to him. I love to linger over the memories of this noble-minded man, for it is to his influence I attribute whatever virtues I possess. He taught me to be honest and true and kind, to scorn a lie or deceit of any sort, whether acted or spoken, to do my duty fearlessly, and to live, so far as in me lay, that I should not be ashamed to stand before the tribunal of either God or man.

I stood waving my hand until he disappeared through the gateway, and then turned slowly to my room in order to read the colonel's letter.

It was very brief, and ran as follows: "Dear Colin, I have not forgotten you. Pacheco tells me you are comfortable and progressing nicely. The proposal that you should stay with his people came from him; I thought it very kind. As I desire you to be completely recovered before getting into harness again, you will remain in your

present quarters, *whatever happens*, until you hear from me again. This is of course a private communication. From your colonel and friend, William Walker."

I could not quite understand this. The words "whatever happens" seemed to imply that he was meditating a move of some kind, and just at first I was a little disturbed at the idea of being left out.

Of course I said nothing to the Pachecos about my note, but I awaited with considerable impatience Don Miguel's next visit, feeling sure that he would be the bearer of important tidings.

Nor was I mistaken. He looked more gloomy even than on the former occasion, and, in response to my eager questions, said, "Ah! it is clear you have not heard of what has happened. The alliance is broken, your countrymen are gone, and we are left to do battle with our threefold enemies."

Had I not been forewarned, this information would have caused me much anxiety; even as it was I felt rather startled.

"Are you quite sure?" I asked; "perhaps there may be some mistake."

"Oh, no! the matter is plain. The mischief has been growing with each succeeding day, and yesterday it broke into an open rupture. Colonel Walker marched the Falange to Realejo, and embarked on board the *Vesta*. To speak the truth, I scarcely expected to find you here; but your leader's action was so sudden that I suppose he overlooked you."

"In which case," I answered lightly, "you must exert your influence and get a commission for me in your army."

"Do you really mean it?"

"Certainly. If my countrymen do not return, I shall throw in my lot with you."

"It is very provoking," he continued disconsolately; "Munoz, our general, you know, is making his arrangements for a decisive battle, and the Falange would be simply invaluable."

The ladies of the house received the news of my comrades' departure with a great deal of interest. Inez laughingly exclaimed that for the future I must consider myself their prisoner, which I asserted would not prove a very disagreeable position.

However, as several days passed without any information of the filibusters' movements, I began to be a little uneasy, in spite of the increased kindness of the captain's relatives.

My leg was now quite well, and I began to weary of my peaceful life, so that it was with the greatest pleasure I heard one evening that a "huge Americano" was in the patio requesting to see Lieutenant Foster.

"It is our good-natured giant returned," exclaimed Inez when the servant had delivered his message; "let him come in."

While I hesitated—for I thought if it were Trevethik he would probably have some private message to communicate—we heard Don Miguel's voice in the hall, and in another minute he entered the room.

"This is a night of surprises," he exclaimed gaily, taking

my hand. "I have sent the messenger into the kitchen to recruit; he has ridden hard."

He was in high spirits. His face bore a pleased look, and his voice had a joyous ring.

"You bring good news, my friend," I said; "what has happened?"

"La Falange has returned, the breach has been healed, and we are to make another attempt on Rivas."

"Do you join us?"

"Yes; by your colonel's express wish. I start in another hour for Realejo."

All this time his mother and sister had been listening attentively. Now their cheeks grew pale and their eyes became dim with tears. They were brave women, and would not begrudge him to his country; but they knew his reckless valour, and feared lest he should be going forth to his death.

Leaving him to console them, I sought the messenger, and found, as I had expected, that it was none other than Trevethik. He was seated at a table in the kitchen, surrounded by the Doña's servants, who looked on with an air of amusement at the rapidity with which he disposed of the viands set before him.

He would have risen at my entrance, but I bade him remain seated and continue his supper, which he did with a keen relish.

"A man never knows the luxury of good food," he remarked presently, "until after a spell on board ship. But now I have really finished," he continued with a sigh, as

though sorry at being compelled to desist. "If you take my advice, sir, you will provide yourself with a good meal before setting out; I don't know when you'll see another."

"Have you brought my marching orders, Phil?"

"Yes, sir. Lieutenant Foster will report himself without delay to the commander-in-chief at Realejo. Colonel's orders, sir, and the *Vesta* sails at daybreak."

Leaving Phil in the kitchen, I hurried to my room, and proceeded to make the necessary preparations for my approaching departure. Just as I had concluded, a servant knocked at the door, bringing a request from the captain that I would rejoin him and the ladies as soon as convenient.

They had partially banished the traces of their grief, and had prepared a nice little supper, to which Don Miguel and I sat down.

Poor ladies! they strove hard to appear merry, and laughed at my description of Trevethik's gastronomic performance. I think, however, we were all pleased when the meal came to an end, for the pretence at cheerfulness deceived neither them nor us.

The time came at last to say Good-bye, and very sad was the farewell greeting. As I thanked them for their kindness to a poor wounded and destitute foreigner, I could not keep the tears from my eyes.

"Farewell, Señor Foster," said the elder lady; "you have grown very dear to me. I will pray to the good God that he will shield you from danger and keep you safe. If, during this terrible war, it should chance that you meet

Luis, my other son, let the thought of his mother stay your arm."

Inez sobbed aloud. "Good-bye, Colin," she cried; "we shall never forget you; we shall join you in our prayers with Miguel and Luis."

I bowed my head, I dared not trust myself to speak. I had scarcely known a mother's love, never a sister's affection, yet I felt toward these two as if I had really been a near and dear relative.

We formed a very quiet party as we rode through the empty streets. Philip had dropped behind, and my companion and I had not shaken off the gloom of our sorrowful leave-taking.

However, as we left the city behind, we began to take more and more interest in the prospect of our future campaign, and after a time I found Pacheco eager to discuss the chances of this second expedition.

He did not tell me so, but I knew perfectly well he was burning to wipe out the disgrace of his troops on the previous occasion. Listening to his talk, I felt that not even in the Falange would the Serviles find a more daring or reckless enemy than this Nicaraguan officer, whose pride had received such a heavy blow.

It was fortunate that we had him for a companion, as the night was dark. Trevethik had only an imperfect acquaintance with the road, so that had he and I been left to ourselves we should most likely have mistaken the way.

As it was, our guide led us straight to our destination, where, late though it was, we discovered everything in a

state of eager activity, and, as usual, the hardest worker there was the colonel.

"Glad to see you, Colin," he said with a smile. "Fit for duty? That's well; there's plenty to be done. I have a heap of correspondence for you to begin upon to-morrow.—Ah, captain," to Pacheco, "your men seem in good spirits.—Trevethik, house your cattle in that shed for the present, and bear a hand with those barrels of powder.—Lieutenant Foster, you had better go to your berth at once; I shall require you early in the morning."

Threading my way carefully through the groups of men, with an occasional greeting from my old acquaintances, I steered myself to the *Vesta*. Here I hastened to obey the colonel's orders by seeking my berth, though I knew there would be little likelihood of sleep.

The uproar on deck was tremendous. The constant tramp of the men; the shouts of the officers, encouraging, chiding, and giving directions; the pushing and dragging of heavy packages; the rattle of the chains as the cargo was lowered into the hold, made a din and clatter sufficient, one would have imagined, to have awakened the Seven Sleepers.

My heart, too, beat fast with unwonted excitement. I had not forgotten the parting from my friends in Leon; but their grief and tears were partly buried by the thoughts of the stirring enterprise in which I was about to embark, and these alone sufficed to drive sleep from my eyes.

CHAPTER VII.

TAKEN PRISONER.

NOTHING of any importance occurred during the voyage, and on August 29th we landed at San Juan without opposition.

It was a dreary-looking place, but we were in good spirits, and a slight gleam of pleasure rested on our commander's face as he watched the hearty energy with which each man bent to his allotted task.

Toward nightfall Pacheco came to my quarters. I had seen little of him since the embarkation at Realejo, for he had been busily engaged in drilling and disciplining his men.

"Colin, would you like to go with me?" he asked. "I have received orders to take a party of men and reconnoitre."

"Certainly," I answered promptly; "that is, if the colonel will allow it."

"His permission has already been given. I am to take a score of my own men, and ten Americanos. If you are willing I will leave the choosing of the latter to you, only I stipulate for Trevethik."

"Have no uneasiness," I replied laughingly, "I will make

a good selection;" a promise which, with the assistance of Trevethik, I was enabled to fulfil.

An hour later we were drawn up for the colonel's inspection. "I admire your taste, captain," he said good-naturedly, as he walked down the line; "you have picked out ten of my very best men."

Pacheco bowed, and turned toward me with a smile; then after a few brief words of encouragement from the colonel, we stepped out into the darkness of the night.

Our leader's orders were very precise. We were to push steadily forward, take possession of any place likely to prove useful to the main body of the troops, secure all the information that could be obtained, and on no account to engage the enemy, unless absolutely compelled so to do.

The march was far from inspiriting. The night was shrouded in thick gloom, and the men, being ignorant of the enemy's position, were obliged to preserve a rigid silence. The only sounds were the screams of the night birds, or, now and then, the sudden rush of some startled animal bursting from the dense thickets which flanked our course. At daybreak we entered a little village, or rather hamlet, consisting of half a dozen adobe huts. Pacheco ordered the inmates to come into the street, which they willingly did, and showed no sign of fear.

They all belonged to the mixed race, partly Spanish, partly Indian, and showed evident signs of poverty. The men gathered around our captain, and answered his questions freely and without hesitation.

The Serviles, they told us, were at Rivas in great force

and were commanded by Guardiola, the Tiger of Honduras. His soldiers were patrolling the roads, but they had no idea we had yet landed, and performed their duties in a very careless manner.

The memory of their decisive victory had inspired them with an overweening confidence. These villagers indeed stated that the Serviles openly boasted they would allow our troops to march inland, and then, placing themselves between us and the sea, cut off our retreat.

This was the first place at which we broke our march; and having rested a couple of hours, we resumed our journey, taking even more precaution than we had done hitherto.

Nothing, however, of importance happened. We fell in with a few natives, who all told a similar story to that which we had already heard, but of the Serviles themselves we discovered not a trace.

At the approach of night, Pacheco halted in a favourable place which had been selected by his scouts, and having eaten a frugal supper, we rolled ourselves in our blankets, and prepared to snatch a few hours' sleep.

About midnight I was considerably startled by feeling a hand placed over my mouth. Jumping up in alarm I recognized Trevethik, who whispered, "Hush, do not make a noise; where is the captain?"

I pointed to Pacheco, who, wrapped in his cloak, was sleeping soundly scarcely a yard away from us. Trevethik nodded, and still speaking hardly above his breath, said, "When you have heard what I have to say, waken him gently, and repeat it to him."

I pressed his hand to let him know I was listening, and he went on guardedly: "There is treachery at work already; one of the sentinels has fled. I have sent Dennis to keep watch. Now you must waken the captain and let him know, for I fear the fellow's desertion bodes us no good. If the enemy happen to be close at hand in any considerable numbers, the traitor's information will enable them to catch us nicely, like rats in a trap."

I aroused Pacheco without much difficulty, and confided to him Trevethik's discovery, together with the fears with which it had inspired him.

He listened at first as if incredulous, but when I had made it clear to him he agreed with Trevethik that under certain conditions the danger was extremely grave.

"We must double the sentries and send out scouts," he said. "Colin, take Trevethik and the Irishman, with three of my men, and search the thickets toward Rivas. You had better scatter, but not too widely, and fall back at the first sign of the enemy's advance. Meanwhile, I will make every preparation to give them a warm reception."

Rapidly collecting my band, I hurriedly explained what was to be done, and having allotted each man his station, gave the order to march.

Our great difficulty lay in the darkness of the night and our ignorance of the country.

If in order to attack us the Serviles were compelled to proceed along the transit road, the danger would be slight, unless indeed they appeared in overwhelming numbers. Even in this latter case I reckoned that our men, well

posted and forewarned, would probably be able to give a good account of themselves.

What we did not know was, if there existed a path through the forest along which they could creep stealthily and silently until they surrounded Pacheco's party.

Keeping Trevethik in my own company, I dispatched Brogan with one of our native allies to scour the country on our left, while the two other Nicaraguans skirted the road itself.

"Remember," I said, as we parted, "there must be no panic, no useless firing, and each man must depend upon himself."

"Don't forget, Phil," I added, as the others disappeared in the darkness, "if I fall or am taken prisoner, your duty is to get clear away. Those we have left behind depend upon us."

I said this because I knew the dear brave fellow would willingly risk or even sacrifice his life to rescue me from danger, which, considering the duty we owed to the others, I could not allow.

The more I pondered, the more clearly I perceived the necessity for preventing a surprise of Pacheco and his men. I saw clearly that a successful attack upon him, right in the very beginning of our enterprise, might, and probably would, endanger us all. The slaughter of the Nicaraguans under my old friend could have but one result—the remainder of our native allies would immediately disappear, leaving us to continue the struggle against overwhelming odds.

These thoughts passed through my mind as, striving with wide-open eyes to pierce the darkness, and straining my ears in the endeavour not to lose a single sound, I stumbled awkwardly along.

Our progress was painfully slow, for not a single foot could be gained without encountering some obstacle. Giant trees with enormous trunks and thick dense overhanging branches met us on every hand. Huge plants, the nature of which we could not understand, impeded our advance. Twining round each other and round the trees, their rope-like tendrils formed a vast and nearly impenetrable network.

Once my foot slipped upon a soft wriggling body, and a low hiss warned me that I had trodden upon a snake. Naturally I felt a thrill of disgust, but the incident did not occasion me much alarm. I knew from Pacheco that almost all the reptiles in Nicaragua are comparatively harmless.

Neither were we in any great danger from wild animals, from which, considering its geographical position, the country is singularly free.

Occasionally, indeed, one sees a puma, which the natives call a lion, and a wild cat, which is honoured with the name of tiger, but, except in very rare instances, neither one nor the other does much hurt.

Before advancing many yards I lost sight of Trevethik, who was between me and the road; and by degrees I began, without knowing it, to veer more and more to the right, which of course carried me further into the forest.

Suddenly I stopped in surprise. I could see nothing,

but from the nature of the ground I knew I had stumbled accidentally upon a kind of pathway. It was very narrow, not more than a couple of yards in width, and choked more or less with the rank, luxuriant tropical growth. Still it was a path, and the very fact that it was not quite impassable proved clearly that it must be in fairly regular use.

I advanced a few paces, and then paused irresolutely. Every moment the importance of the discovery strengthened in my mind, and I wished earnestly that I could acquaint Trevethik with it.

Plainly this was a road along which the Serviles might steal unperceived into the very heart perhaps of Pacheco's camp. I scarcely knew in what way to act. Ought I to go forward or back?

How I longed for Trevethik! I wondered if I could make him hear. We had previously agreed upon a signal, and though it might prove dangerous, I determined to try it.

Leaning my back against a large tree, and almost hidden amongst a network of hanging leaves, I placed my hand to my mouth and uttered the shrill mournful screech of the owl. I listened eagerly, but there was no answering cry. Again and again at short intervals I repeated the signal, without eliciting any response.

No; it was quite useless. Probably he was too far off, and I must think out my plan unaided. The precious minutes were flying rapidly; I must make up my mind at once. To advance or retire by this trail until it struck

Pacheco's camp, which should it be? I stepped from my retreat into the middle of the path, and turned my face to the backward route.

At that moment a dozen dusky forms glided past me in the darkness. Instantly I was surrounded. Front, rear, and either flank were guarded by my foes; I was in a trap. One glance told me that escape was impossible. I could not get out, I could not even struggle with any hope of success; they could kill me, and probably would before I had sufficient time to raise my rifle to my shoulder.

My rifle! ah, true, perhaps I could still do something. For myself I must die, but I might yet save my comrades. The sound of shooting might reach Phil's ears, and the rest would be an easy matter. He could not save me, but he would understand the significance of the report, and would hurry back to the captain with the news of the Serviles' advance. Thank God! at least I should die in doing my duty.

All these thoughts and many others flashed through my mind in a far shorter space of time than it has taken to chronicle them; for, standing face to face with death, one's brain works with incredible swiftness.

With a short prayer, not uttered, but rather felt, I fired without taking aim, for I had no wish to kill. Then at the top of my voice I shouted, "Back, Phil, back. We are surrounded. Fly, fly for your life!"

With a rush the Serviles bore in upon me from all quarters, and with the word "Fly" still in my throat, I was hurled to the ground by a heavy blow. I could not

rise, I could not utter a sound, but lay in a kind of swoon, though able to hear everything that went on around me.

The light from a lantern flashed into my face, and a harsh voice exclaimed, "Bring a rope somebody, and hang the young cub to this tree; he's spoiled all our plans."

The man spoke angrily; but though terribly frightened at his words, it gave me fresh courage to learn that I had thwarted their schemes.

"Better take him to Guardiola," urged another, a trifle less gruffly.

The first speaker laughed disagreeably. "What's the good of that?" he growled. "We shall only have our trouble for nothing; he'll hang him on the nearest bush. Just as well string him up here, and save ourselves the bother of carrying him."

Then I heard another voice, sweet, low, and musical, which almost caused me to start from the ground. Surely I must be dreaming, or were my senses leaving me? I strained my ears to the utmost, listening intently. Where was I? What had happened? Was I back in the camp, or once more being nursed in Leon by Don Miguel's mother and his beautiful sister?

I could readily fancy myself in either place, for most assuredly it was Don Miguel who was speaking.

"He is but a boy after all," he said gently, "and has done us no harm. He will be of greater service to us alive than dead; at all events, the general must have the chance of judging."

"As you please, captain," replied the man who had

called for the rope, "but had I my way he would not live five minutes. The lion's whelp has a nasty habit of becoming a full-grown lion. However, you're in charge, so we'll take him to Guardiola. Are we to turn back?"

"Yes, it is useless to proceed; they will be on their guard, and we cannot hope to surprise them."

The man with the rasping voice now kicked me, and said sharply, "Get up, you young dog; are you going to lie there all night?"

I turned and stared at him stupidly. I had no mind that they should learn I was acquainted with their language, besides which he spoke so villanously that I really had much difficulty in following his speech.

"He does not understand you, Josef," said the leader, addressing his subordinate in Spanish; and bending over me, he added in English, "Come, my lad, rouse yourself; you are my prisoner, and my men are ready to march."

Looking into his face as the kindly brown eyes peered into mine, a sudden light flashed into my mind and cleared up the mystery which had so disturbed me. The captain of the Serviles, the man who was about to lead me to a shameful death, was Luis Pacheco the brother of my friend.

"I am ready, Don Luis," I said in a weak voice, for the blow on the head had hurt me considerably.

"Don Luis!" he echoed in astonishment. "Who are you, that you know my name?"

"Keep me by your side, and I will explain as we go along."

"Will you pass your word that you will not attempt to escape until I have delivered you to the general?"

As it happened, I had already begun to calculate the chances of escape on our route through the woods, and naturally hesitated to give the pledge required. If I tried to get away and failed, they would shoot me without doubt; but even as it was, every step only brought me nearer to death.

Luis Pacheco read my thoughts and shook his head. "It is useless," he said, not unkindly, but with firm decision. "I am sorry, for I fear Guardiola will not spare you, but I must do my duty. Pass your word that you will make no endeavour to gain your freedom, and you shall accompany us unbound. If you do not, I must tie your arms securely, and give my men orders to shoot you at the slightest suspicion of an attempted escape. It remains with you to make a choice, but if you are wise you will accept my offer. Do not rush on death; something may yet happen in your favour. *Quien sabe?*"

I felt his words were true, and that he gave me good advice. Even had Trevethik heard my shouts, he could do nothing single-handed; and I could not expect Don Miguel to risk the lives of his men on such a dangerous errand as the endeavour to effect my rescue must prove.

My irresolution lasted no longer. I turned to him and said simply, "I thank you for your kindness; I will accept your offer and accompany you to your general. Beyond that I can promise nothing."

"You do well," he answered. "And now we must march; the men are becoming impatient."

I noticed that he handled his little force with great skill, placing the soldiers in such a position that a surprise would have been almost impossible.

"Now," he said, as we walked on side by side, "I am curious to learn how you came to call me by my name."

"Let me begin by first asking you a question. Do you know the name of the officer whose men you intended to capture a little time since?"

"No; but what has that to do with it?"

"So much that when you hear it, you will no longer wonder at my knowledge. He is called Don Miguel Pacheco."

"My brother! is it possible? May our Lady be praised that you fell across our path and disconcerted our plans. My brother Miguel! it is long since I last saw him. Ah! this war is a terrible business. Father arrayed against son, brother against brother; alas! how will it all end?"

"Your brother is well," I whispered, "and the dear ones at Leon bade me, if ever I were thrown in your way, tell you that they pray day and night for your safety."

He gripped my hand nervously, and I knew, though I could not see, that his eyes were wet with tears. My few words had brought before him a picture of his childhood's home, his gentle loving mother, his beautiful sister, and the handsome gallant soldier against whom it was his duty to fight even to the death.

We had proceeded for some distance in silence, when he said brokenly, "Tell me all about them—how they looked, how they spoke, what they said of me—leave nothing out.

Ah! if you only knew how I have hungered to hear about them!"

Still speaking in English—for I thought it best to keep him in ignorance of my knowledge of the Spanish language—I gave him an account of my own adventures in Nicaragua. I told him of my intimacy with Don Miguel, of the kindness which I had received at the hands of his family, and finally of his mother's pathetic request when I bade them farewell.

By this time we had begun to get clear of the woods, the dawn had risen, and I could distinctly see his features, which bore a striking resemblance to those of his sister. He was a more slightly-built man than Don Miguel, and his face bore traces of greater refinement and exclusiveness. His hands were white and delicately-shaped like a lady's; but he clasped his sword firmly, and carried himself with a military air.

I noticed that he was considerably agitated, but I did not guess the reason until he spoke. "Alas! Señor Foster," he said, "you who have eaten bread in my house, and been admitted to the friendship of my people, what can I do? You cannot escape; you have pledged your word, and death would be preferable to a dishonoured life."

I thought of the colonel, and the brave, true-hearted Trevethik. How would they receive a man who, to save his life, had broken his parole?

"Yes," I assented warmly, "you speak truth. I have passed my word to go to your general; after that, I shall seize the first opportunity of escaping."

He sighed heavily. "My poor lad," he said, "no one

ever escapes who has once felt the fangs of the Tiger of Honduras. You do not know Guardiola; he is not a man, but a wild animal. He knows nothing of pity, nothing of compassion; his heart is iron. He is brave—brave as the wild beasts, and as savage. It grieves me to say it, but you must expect no mercy from Guardiola. The rope or a bullet, one or the other, will be your fate; and I am powerless to help you. I may perhaps induce Corral to use his influence on your behalf; but do not trust to that, it is a slender reed at the best."

"I thank you for your kind sympathy," I replied earnestly; "the outlook is not promising, but should the worst happen, I will at least try to die bravely and not shame my comrades."

He pressed my hand furtively, and drew aside with a warning gesture, for the eyes of the savage Josef were fixed suspiciously upon us.

Shortly after the conclusion of our conversation we debouched from the wood and entered upon the road to Rivas. The approach to the town was patrolled by bands of Serviles, who gazed at me with interest, and amused themselves by making insulting remarks on my helpless condition.

"Bravo, Josef!" shouted one to my forbidding-looking captor, who now marched close at my side with a drawn sword. "You have a dainty morsel there for the Tiger's breakfast."

"Just enough to whet his appetite," grinned another with a hideous leer. "But never mind, he will have a full meal before long."

Of course I took no notice of these remarks, but marched steadily forward as if ignorant of their significance.

My first visit to Rivas had proved disastrous; this one threatened to end in a still more unpleasant manner. Still I endeavoured to keep up my spirits, and even experienced a faint pleasure in recognizing the various places which I had passed on the previous march.

There was the hill from which our native allies had stood and watched the fight, the sloping lane down which we had forced our way, the plaza where the enemy had so obstinately withstood our attack, and the adobe huts behind which we had found a temporary refuge.

These, I learned, were now used as military prisons, and at the first our party halted. Reserving a file of men, the leader directed Josef to march the others to their quarters, and undoing the fastenings of the door invited me to enter.

"Your parole is at an end," he whispered, "but attempt nothing rashly. I am going now to submit my report. I will send you some food, and pay you a visit at the first opportunity. Do not forget that a sentry will be posted at the door, with orders to shoot you if you try to get away."

I nodded silently, and he withdrew, leaving me to my own thoughts. These, one may be sure, were not of an agreeable nature. I looked round the place which served me for a prison. The walls, as I have said, were of mud, and the same kind of material formed the floor. The apartment was absolutely bare of furniture; they had not given me even a bundle of straw on which to lie.

In the wall which faced the town had been cut two

holes, through which the wind whistled shrilly. As far as I could judge, they were intended to serve two purposes. They admitted light, and also allowed the sentinel to glance at short intervals into the interior, thus frequently assuring himself that his prisoner was still there.

Presently the door opened and Don Luis entered. He was closely followed by a soldier-jailer bearing a pitcher of water, and a dish containing some vile vegetable compound mixed with rancid oil, the whole mess smelling abominably.

I had, however, been without food for some considerable time, and the long march had quickened my appetite, so, forcing back my disgust, I resolved to begin the banquet thus generously provided. The drinking could be managed easily enough, but the thick soup or pottage was a more difficult matter.

The jailer having placed his burden on the floor, had, at a sign from Don Luis, quietly departed.

"It is not nice," said the Servile officer, with a grimace at the contents of the dish, "but it is better than starving."

"That's true enough," I answered laughingly; "but what puzzles me is, how I am to eat the nasty stuff. Do they intend me to scoop it up with my fingers, for I cannot perceive any spoon? Perhaps those articles are expensive in this part of the world!"

"Not at all," he answered gaily; "on the contrary, we not only provide you with a spoon, but allow you to eat it when it has performed its office."

"Eat my spoon!" I cried, aghast. "Do you imagine I am a human ostrich?"

"It will not hurt your digestion. Amongst the lower classes in this country it is a common habit to eat the spoons. But your food is getting cold, and however nasty it may be hot, you will find it much worse cold. Come, take your spoon; it lies there by the side of the dish. I will talk while you eat, for the length of my stay is limited."

My companion pointed to a round thin wafer of what appeared to be brown shoe-leather, and which was certainly quite as tough. "That is your spoon," he said. "We call it a *tortilla;* and as you have not seen it made, there is no reason why you should not eat it after you have finished your pottage."

"A tortilla!" I exclaimed, examining the brown stuff curiously; "and pray, what is a tortilla?"

"A very useful article of diet," he answered, "as you will discover, if ever you get away from here, and the war should continue. It is made of maize sprinkled with water and mixed with a little lime. This stuff is ground again and again until it becomes a compact white paste. The tortilla-maker, who is generally a woman, takes this paste, and having kneaded it, cuts it into little round slabs. These she proceeds to pat carefully, one at a time, between the palms of her hands. As fast as each thin round wafer is prepared, it is passed to another woman, who toasts it slightly on both sides at a charcoal fire. I can assure you that the tortilla, nicely made, and eaten hot, is an extremely dainty morsel."

"Ah," I said disconsolately, "I do not doubt your word, but this,"—I had finished the unsavoury pottage and was

contemplating my novel spoon—"has not seen the fire for some time past!"

"No," he admitted good-humouredly, as I struggled hard to get my teeth into it; "I greatly fear that the present specimen will not cause you to fall in love with what may almost be called a national dish."

I have compared the tortilla to brown shoe-leather, but the comparison did the latter an injustice—no leather was ever half so tough as this vegetable spoon.

During the time that I was endeavouring painfully to masticate this "dainty morsel," Don Luis told me that both Corral and Guardiola, the two Servile generals, had started on a reconnaissance, so that my fate would probably not be decided upon for some hours.

"Very likely Guardiola will send for you this evening," he continued, "but it is just possible that he may hold your sentence over until the morning. In that lies your only hope. You cannot get out before dark, and even then the difficulty is almost insurmountable. I have dropped a knife and an iron hook in that corner. The wall at the end is far from firm, and you may perhaps cut your way through in the night. Should you succeed, do not attempt to return to San Juan, unless you make a very wide detour. Every avenue is zealously guarded, and you will certainly be recaptured. Make your way first to the north, for in that direction the country is open. Now I must go, or the sentry will be suspicious. Farewell, and may God send you a happy deliverance out of your troubles!"

He pressed my hand affectionately; the sentinel opened

the door at his order; and I was left alone. The food and the kindness of Don Luis combined had cheered me wonderfully. I no longer felt despondent or afraid of facing my position, though the danger was certainly extremely grave.

I might be summoned at any moment before the Servile general, and from the observations which had met me on all sides, I knew that meant a certain and most likely a speedy death.

On the other hand, I might be respited until the morning, and on that frail ground I built my hopes. True, I was practically unarmed, alone in the middle of a strange country, and surrounded by enemies, besides being clothed in a dress which would mark me as a filibuster to every one I met. My one advantage, indeed the only point in my favour, was my knowledge of the language.

Directly the door closed behind Don Luis, I took possession of the knife and hook, and lay down by the wall he had pointed out, as if to sleep. Luckily this was the very best position that could have been chosen for my purpose. The sentry could now see nothing but my feet, which I designedly placed well within his view. Not knowing how soon I might be interrupted, I dared not begin the actual work of cutting the wall, so I contented myself with finding and marking the joints between the bricks.

This consumed a considerable time, as I was forced to labour very secretly, but the task was at last accomplished. Carefully hiding my precious tools inside my shirt, I crouched against the wall, and in spite of the dread ordeal which awaited me fell into a sound sleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

FRIENDS IN NEED.

IT was well that I had taken the precaution thoroughly to secrete my tools. When I awoke the little room was filled with armed men, one of whom was shaking me roughly by the shoulder.

"Come, wake up," he said savagely; "there is no need to sleep so soundly. You will have plenty of opportunity for a good long sleep after Guardiola has seen you, and I'll promise that no one will interrupt your slumbers."

He ended with a loud laugh, in which all the others joined, at the brutal jest, which I affected not to understand.

It was getting dark, so that my marks were quite safe, unless the Serviles should take it into their heads to examine the walls. The fear of this caused me to rise quickly and express my willingness to accompany them.

Directly I rose to my feet I was placed in the midst of the soldiers and hustled outside. Here they formed up into a solid square, and at the word of their leader, who I found was the hideous Josef, began to march.

It was a solemn and trying moment. Should I ever

return? Judging from the remarks of my captors, it did not appear likely. They at least would be surprised as well as disappointed if I escaped from the clutches of the savage Guardiola. Half a dozen careless questions, and a short sharp order for the bullet or the rope, were clearly what they expected.

I knew that the blood had left my cheeks, and that my limbs trembled, as they hurried me along. Still I held my head erect, for I dreaded lest they should guess that my courage faltered.

Halting at the door of a long, low building, the men fell back in perfect order, and I was left to the care of Josef.

"Come," he said roughly, and making a sign to the soldiers on duty, who threw open an inner door, he pushed me into a long, dimly-lighted room.

At first I could distinguish nothing clearly, but after a while I perceived that the room was full of Servile officers. In the midst of a chattering group I recognized my new friend Luis Pacheco, who gave me an encouraging smile.

At the upper end of the room was a small table, behind which were seated two men, one of whom I knew must be the dreaded Guardiola.

Even at this distance of time I can readily recall what a vivid impression he made upon me. He was a dark swarthy man, with black woolly hair like a negro's, large nose, and thick lips. His eyes were fierce and cunning, and he had a most forbidding scowl on his face. One could see at once that he was not a Spaniard, and as a matter of fact he had not a drop of Spanish blood in his veins.

The other man, whom I did not then know, but whom I afterwards discovered to be Corral, differed from his colleague in every respect. The one looked like a brigand, the other like a gallant soldier.

This second man was strikingly handsome, with a genial face and sunny smile, and I could easily imagine that he was the idol of his soldiers.

He regarded me with an air of interest, and I felt that his influence, if he possessed any, would not be exerted against me.

At a signal from Guardiola, the officers nearest the table withdrew to the lower end of the apartment, leaving me facing my judges. I could hear my heart thump vigorously against my ribs, but I stood proudly upright and looked them steadily in the face.

Guardiola now uttered a few vigorous words to his colleague. I could not catch their purport, as he spoke in a kind of *patois* which to me was utterly unintelligible.

Corral, however, nodded his head, and addressing me in Spanish, said, "Señor, we have a few questions to put; can you understand what is said to you?"

From the moment of being taken prisoner I had jealously guarded the fact of my acquaintance with the Spanish language from my captors, and I determined still to preserve the secret. It might not prove of much benefit, but it could not do any harm, and I might get a hint from the conversation of my guards which would be of service.

To this chance circumstance, strangely enough, I owed my life.

Instead of answering Corral's question, I continued to regard him fixedly, and the two generals consulted together.

Presently Guardiola, casting a glance down the room, called for Captain Pacheco, and on his approach conversed with him for some seconds in a low tone. At the end of the conversation Pacheco came to me, and I saw a strange look in his eyes, as though he meditated some risky deed.

"I am to act as interpreter," he announced, speaking rapidly. "Listen. Do not raise your voice; take ample time to consider your answers; but when you speak, speak quietly, and as quickly as you can. I shall understand."

He threw me a meaning look, which confirmed my suspicions that he was plotting something in my favour. However, I could not reply, for, uttering an impatient exclamation, Guardiola roughly ordered him to ask my name and rank.

"Colin Foster, lieutenant."

"Ask him if he can advance any reason why he should not suffer death."

I retorted angrily that I was a properly commissioned officer in a regular army; that in any civilized country my commission would be respected, and I should be treated with the courtesy due to a prisoner of war; but that as yet I had no experience as to how these matters were conducted by savages.

Pacheco translated my speech, toning down the harsher parts, and omitting the last passage altogether. Even in this altered form, however, it proved too independent for

Guardiola, who scowled savagely, and threatened me with instant death.

"Tell him," I said, "that his anger makes him foolish. He may order me to be executed; but if he does, my comrades will slay every Servile who falls into their hands."

This made a deep impression upon Corral, whose face assumed an anxious expression, and the two generals again consulted in low whispers.

For a moment I began to hope my threat had frightened them, but presently Guardiola looking up, said brusquely, "Tell him we will spare his life on one condition. If he will give us all the information he can concerning the rebel army, the number of troops, their disposition, and the plans of the leaders, he shall live; if not, he must die."

My face grew hot when I understood what it was that was being proposed to me, and forgetful of Luis Pacheco's warning I began to reply in a loud angry voice.

He checked me gently. "Softly, my friend," he whispered; "address your remarks to me, or you will spoil all."

"But this is infamous," I said. "What can he think of me to fancy that I would thus betray my comrades in order to save my life? Make him understand that I cast aside his offer with the scorn it deserves. Tell him I am an English lad. Tell him I come from a country where even the boys learn there is something to be feared more than the loss of life, and that is the loss of honour."

"He will hang you."

"I am sorry. The prospect is not cheerful, but I must do my duty."

Luis turned from me with a peculiar smile and faced his superior officers; while I, folding my arms, awaited in silence the terrible sentence which I felt to be inevitable.

At first, wrapped up in my own gloomy thoughts, I paid little attention to what Luis said, but gradually it dawned upon my mind that something very strange was taking place.

What did it mean? Was I dreaming? I could scarcely believe the evidence of my senses as I listened. Suddenly I understood the meaning of his odd behaviour, and the warning to me not to raise my voice. He had not wished my words to reach any one, for he had determined to save me, for a space at least, in spite of myself.

Knowing full well the effect my answer would produce, and ignorant like the rest of my knowledge of Spanish, he resolved to take no notice of my angry words, but invent a reply which might possibly secure for me a few hours' respite.

Accordingly he informed Guardiola that I wished for time in order to consider his proposal. I did not like to turn traitor and betray my comrades, yet at the same time I had no wish to die. If they would grant me until the following morning, I would turn the matter over and give them my decision.

I was thunderstruck, but I dared not show that I understood the interpreter's remarks. What could I do? If I spoke and contradicted his statements, I should but consign my warm-hearted friend to the doom which awaited me. I

could not expose the ruse which he was playing so boldly on my behalf: I could but stand and listen.

Guardiola heard him with an angry impatience. From him no mercy need be expected; but the other general seemed inclined to listen favourably to the appeal which he supposed I had made.

For some time they continued to wrangle over my fate, and as they did not lower their voices, snatches of the conversation reached me clearly.

"Better hang him," said Guardiola, speaking in Spanish; "he will be out of mischief. We have suffered sufficiently through him already."

"As you please," answered his companion; "he is in your hands. For myself I should prefer to keep him alive; it will be the better policy. He is only a lad, and will be easily frightened. Send him back to his cell until the morning, and should he still prove obstinate threaten him with torture. Take my word for it, you will soon learn all he knows."

It was a difficult matter to listen to this discussion without betraying myself, but fortunately it did not last long. Corral's reasoning finally prevailed, and Guardiola ordered Don Luis to inform me that he would grant my petition.

"Tell him," he said in conclusion, "that his life is spared until the morning. If when reveille sounds he has not decided to accept my offer, he shall be hanged that instant on the nearest tree."

"It is your last chance," said my friend mournfully.

"Escape if you can, but do not attempt to return to San Juan; the danger is too great."

This friendly advice was interrupted by Guardiola, who roared, "Take him away."

Attended by Josef, who now came forward with drawn sword, I walked boldly to the door, and was immediately surrounded by my escort.

The soldiers showed their surprise and disappointment at my having been ordered back to prison, but Josef comforted them. "It is only for a few hours," he said, with a malicious grin; "the prey is safe, and the tiger amuses himself in watching its struggles to get away."

On our arrival at the hut the jailer unfastened the door and thrust me in violently. "*Peste*," he exclaimed, "what a nuisance! I thought he had been swinging yonder long since."

One of the men uttered a remark, most probably some coarse jest at my expense, for they all laughed boisterously. Then the key was turned in the lock, the heavy bolts were shot into their sockets, and I heard no more.

It was necessary that my struggle for liberty and life should begin at once. The darkness had increased; but having taken the precaution to span the distance from the bottom of the wall to the first of the marked joints, I easily found the proper place, and began work.

There was no time to be lost if I meant to regain my freedom. All too swiftly the short night hours would glide away, and should the morning sun find me still there, my doom was sealed.

Ever as I worked the horrid picture rose before me: the sturdy branch of a giant tree, the hempen rope, a crowd of brutal, jeering soldiers, my own bowed head as I breathed my last prayer to the Almighty Father, and then—!

Noiselessly but swiftly I cut and scraped with redoubled force, until the perspiration poured down my face in streams.

Outside at intervals the sentry stamped to and fro, and then took up his position in the shelter of the doorway. Once, I knew, he came and peered in at one of the slits I have already mentioned; but he could see nothing, and the falling clay made no sound.

Faster and faster I worked, now with my knife and rusty hook, now digging frantically with my nails into the grooves already scooped out. My back ached; the blood flowed to my head, making me dizzy, so that I could scarcely see; my hands were torn and bleeding; but still I persevered. I dared not pause for rest; one single moment wasted might be the means of exchanging freedom for death.

But though I slackened not my toil, my mind was busy. Once again I lived in that peaceful English home of my childish fancy, happy in the affection of my gentle mother. Then, as in a panorama, there flitted before me pictures of my later life. My father, grave and reserved, but always with a tender smile for me, his only child. I watched him fade and droop, day by day, until at length he died, commending me with noble trusting words to God's care. Then I saw the colonel, hiding his emotion beneath stern,

hard features; but most of all I think I saw Philip, my brave, devoted Philip. His eyes were sad and his face mournful, for I was in deadly peril, and he could not help me.

Suddenly, in the silence and the darkness, a strange sound, which caused me to start in affright, fell on my ears. What was happening? I listened eagerly. Could I have been mistaken? No; that was surely the sharp click of the lock being turned, and now the heavy bolts were shot back, slowly, cautiously, and with deadened sound.

What was it? I thought of a hundred things, and rejected them all. Had Don Luis bribed my jailer, and was this he himself coming to set me free? For an instant I nursed the thought and was almost happy; but my joy did not abide long. Such a solution was impossible for many reasons, and a darker apprehension took possession of me.

Had Guardiola, frightened by my threat of the filibusters' vengeance, and not daring to execute me publicly, given orders that I should be put to death in the secrecy of my prison?

In my excited state this seemed not at all unlikely, and I had resolved to sell my life as dearly as possible, when a much simpler explanation presented itself.

After all it was doubtless nothing more than the sentry making sure that all was safe.

Filled with this idea I wrapped myself in my cloak, and, crouching closely against the wall, breathed regularly as if in a deep sleep.

I could see nothing, but I heard the door cautiously pushed ajar, then as quietly closed, and a heavy footstep advance toward me. Nearer and nearer it came, and still I lay, feigning a sound slumber, though I could scarcely keep from shrieking aloud. At length my mysterious visitor fell on his knees, and groping blindly about touched my face.

If it were the jailer, why did he not open his lantern and satisfy himself as to my safety?

But perhaps he had none. I lay still; the worst was over. Had his intention been to kill me, he would have struck without delay.

Hitherto the difficulty had been to remain quiet; now I could scarcely refrain from shouting with joy. A wonderful thing happened—a voice whispered my name.

"Colin!" it said, "Colin, my dear lad, are you awake? Speak low; it is I, Trevethik."

I rose to my feet and, as he bent over me, threw my arms around the dear fellow's neck, while tears of gratitude rushed into my eyes.

I began to pour out my thanks, but he checked me. "Hush! we have no time to lose; every moment increases the danger. Dennis is keeping guard outside; come."

With his hand in mine I crossed the floor of the hut, and opening the door quietly we passed out. The sentry was standing upright as if still on duty, but the Irishman had prevented him, by the application of a neatly-improvised gag, from making any sound.

The sight of the helpless soldier gave me an idea, and I

whispered my plan to Trevethik, who assented. "Only be quick," he said; "time is precious."

Taking the Servile into the hut, I made him rapidly divest himself of his uniform, which I immediately donned, Trevethik meanwhile dressing the unlucky wight in my tunic and trousers. Then binding him hand and foot we placed him in the corner, and taking his weapons, stole cautiously out and fastened the door behind us.

As Trevethik had stated, our peril was very great, for we were right in the heart of the enemy's stronghold. In the direction of the transit road numerous parties patrolled the country, while the sentries were posted so thickly as to render escape well-nigh impossible.

Our only hope of safety lay to the north, which, according to Luis Pacheco, was not so closely guarded. I confided my ideas to Trevethik, who said, "Yes, that is the one road out. I will go first, and Dennis will bring up the rear."

The Irishman pressed my hand, and we fell into our places under the shadow of the wall. In many respects it was fortunate for us that the night was dark, as, although the want of light proved an obstacle to our progress, we were at the same time shielded from our foes.

The chief thing which told against us was our ignorance of the construction of the town, but Trevethik, bearing in mind the way in which he had come, led us in the opposite direction.

Silently and without a word we sped on, now swiftly traversing an open space, now pausing to listen to the challenge of a sentinel as some officer of the rounds passed

on his way, occasionally crouching low beneath the shelter of some friendly buildings, scarcely daring to breathe, as we waited for a patrol to pass us.

Here and there we were compelled to make a wide detour, in order to avoid small parties of soldiers who lay grouped around their watch-fires. The further we advanced, however, the plainer it became that our decision to travel north was a wise one. Having no danger to apprehend from that quarter, Guardiola had contented himself with stationing a few outposts on that side of the town; and I was beginning to think we had gained a position of comparative safety, when a low "Hist!" from Trevethik caused us to sink noiselessly on the ground.

Scarcely a yard away stood a soldier leaning on his musket, and, as far as we could make out, in a listening attitude. He stood on a little hillock, while we, screened from observation by a clump of brushwood, lay in the hollow at his feet.

We dared not move; we could only wait and pray that he would retire. Presently the Irishman touched my arm, and turning round, I beheld with dismay that something unusual had occurred in the town. The distance was too great for any sounds to reach us, but we could see a considerable number of swiftly-moving lights, to which the sentinel's gaze had been attracted.

The same thought struck us both. My escape had been discovered, and search parties were being dispatched in order to effect my recapture. Every moment the situation became more critical. To remain in our present position

would be to fall into the hands of our enemies, yet to advance was equally dangerous.

All this time the man above us remained motionless as a statue. And now the danger became more pressing. We could see the lights of one party advancing in our direction, and I felt the Irishman quiver with impatience. "We must kill him," he whispered.

Trevethik shook his head in dissent. "He would have time to discharge his musket, and we should be lost," he returned cautiously.

"Leave him to me," I whispered, "and do you, when you see the coast clear, push straight on; I will rejoin you."

Without giving them an opportunity to remonstrate I backed noiselessly out from the bushes, and proceeded to crawl as rapidly as possible in the direction of the town. I was about to play a risky game, but I felt it was our sole chance.

Having reached what I conceived to be a suitable spot for my purpose, I stood upright, and, once more facing round, ran swiftly toward the silent watcher. Breathing hard, as though nearly exhausted, and showing every sign of distress, I reached the copse which hid my comrades. This brought me in full sight of the sentinel, who, raising his musket to his shoulder, challenged me sharply.

"Friend!" I gasped, throwing up my hands.

"Advance, friend, and give the countersign."

"'Guardiola!' But quick! where is your captain? where are the others? There is not a moment to lose; I am come from the general."

"What is it? what has happened? I saw the lights."

"The filibusters!" I cried in a frightened tone; "the filibusters are close upon us. The picket is to fall back instantly. Run to your officer; I will warn your comrades."

"Bah!" he said, "there is no need to be afraid of the filibusters. We have given them one lesson; we will repeat it."

"*Quien sabe?*" I drawled. "But hasten; we shall need every man, and Guardiola isn't in the best of tempers."

The man laughed and disappeared in the darkness. Trevethik and Dennis, who had heard every word without understanding one, now came forward, and not wasting a second in explanation, we pushed on ahead.

At the worst, my stratagem must secure for us a considerable start, and every yard gained was one chance the more in our favour. We stumbled along, now falling into a hollow, now tripping in some trailing creepers, but always increasing the distance between ourselves and the Serviles, and at every step our spirits rose.

Suddenly Trevethik, who was still leading, stopped. He had come to the brink of a river, of the breadth and depth of which we were ignorant. "Can you swim, Mr. Foster?" he asked anxiously; "I know that Dennis can."

"Yes; we had better get across. Shall we strip?"

"I think so. Tie your clothes in a bundle and carry them on your head."

"Mind the cartridges, Mr. Foster," said the Irishman; "and if the nigger left a thrifle of powder in that extraor-

dinary box, be sure and kape it dry. He may want it again before long, if ye haven't distributed it among his friends. Och, murther, but the water is cowld and wet!"

By this time the light was beginning to break, but as yet we could see only a few yards in front of us. Whether the passage of the river would prove dangerous or not, we were of course quite unable to determine. Still we durst not linger, and with a silent prayer for aid we prepared to cross.

"Wade as far as you can," said Trevethik, "and if the current is too powerful for you, shout; Dennis and I will bear a hand."

As Dennis had said, the water was exceedingly cold and, in our heated state, the low temperature was the more apparent. This was very annoying, but there was no help for it; we must push on.

We proceeded in Indian file, Trevethik leading, and myself in the middle. The bed of the river was formed of rocks and sharp stones, which cut our bare feet terribly; but even in our misery I could not refrain from laughing at the Irishman's lamentations.

He had slung his boots around his neck, as indeed we all had, and now upbraided Philip in low tones for having persuaded him to remove them from his feet.

"Sure, Trevethik, it's a mighty wise child ye are entoirely; but after all, mayhap, ye're right: the colonel maybe wouldn't like us to be cutting our boots to pieces down there," and he broke off abruptly with a groan, as his bare feet came in contact with a jagged rock.

Trevethik advanced cautiously, picking his way as well

as he could, while I followed closely. For what seemed a considerable distance the water continued to be shallow, barely reaching to my knees. Gradually, however, it became deeper and deeper, until it covered me as far as to the shoulders. Now, too, we began to feel the full strength of the current, which swept down with terrific force, nearly jerking me off my feet.

Even Trevethik with his herculean strength had much ado to preserve his balance. Turning round he cried, "We must swim for it, Mr. Foster; that is our only chance. The current, perhaps, is not very broad, and once through it we are safe. Keep your head well up, and try to land a couple of hundred yards lower down."

I answered cheerfully, and the next moment we were all three battling for our lives in the midst of the angry waters. Luckily I was a strong swimmer, and it was not the first time my two comrades had crossed a river in similar fashion. The chief danger lay in the force of the current, which, in spite of our endeavours, threatened to sweep us away in its course. The struggle was a severe and protracted one, but we won through it, and presently a joyful cry from Trevethik announced that he had once more found bottom.

"Faith!" exclaimed the Irishman, "that was mighty unpleasant while it lasted; but, may the saints defend us: where are we now?"

We had now approached the other bank of the river, which was high, rugged, and bordered with thick trees, forming apparently the outskirts of a dense wood.

"Once there and our safety is assured; they will never find us amongst those trees," cried Trevethik exultingly.

"But how are we to get there?" I asked, as my teeth chattered with the cold.

"Climb it," answered Trevethik. "See, here is a loose boulder close to the bank. That will give us one step upwards."

"If it doesn't topple us back into the river," interrupted Dennis slyly. "Faith! it's a pity we didn't think to borrow a scaling-ladder or two."

"Oh, it's easy enough," Phil said. "Come, Mr. Foster, up you go; a few minutes more, and you will be in the wood."

"Sure, then, the liftinant will be where we are, for we are not out of it yet!"

I laughed at the Irishman's jest, and placing one hand on Phil's arm, managed, after one or two attempts, to mount the boulder. This stood firm, and to my delight I saw that it would not be difficult from my coign of vantage to scale the side of the river. Having communicated this pleasing intelligence to my comrades, I drew on my boots and proceeded to mount.

Once near the top, the rest was an easy matter, as numerous branches of mighty trees hung over the side, forming a natural ladder. Clambering on to one of these I speedily made my way to the ground, and was quickly followed by Dennis and Phil.

Our first care was to dry ourselves thoroughly and put on our clothes; having done which, we held a council of

war. On examination we found that our stock of cartridges and powder had escaped very well. This was distinctly a relief to us all, since we had expected to find it so much damaged by the water as to be useless. Our supply of food was scanty, being limited to a few tortillas and a hunk of soaked bread; but that matter troubled us little. We knew we should find plenty of fruit in the forest, and that we could easily catch any number of birds.

"The first thing now," said Trevethik, when we had made an end of our investigations, "is to decide upon a sleeping-place. A few hours' rest will do us all good, besides which, it will give the Serviles time to get tired of searching for us. We could easily make a comfortable bed on these ferns, were it not for the vermin, but I have no wish for a personal interview with a rattlesnake or a cobra."

"What a pity," ejaculated Dennis gravely, "that when Saint Patrick had finished his labours over yonder, some one had not paid his passage-money to America!"

"There would have been ample scope for his services," I said, laughing; "but I think we need not bother ourselves about the reptiles. Nicaragua seems to be a favoured country; there are hardly any venomous snakes to be met with. Farther south, where the republic borders on Costa Rica, a few have been found, but scarcely anywhere else. Still I think it would be advisable to push a little deeper into the forest. Are we not rather exposed here, if the Serviles should take it into their heads to cross the river?"

"They will not look here for us," said Dennis; "they

will conclude either that we have doubled back toward San Juan, or that we have been drowned."

"That is my opinion also," observed Trevethik; "still, as it is better to err on the safe side, we will take your advice, Mr. Foster, and move further into the forest."

We did not make very rapid progress. The ground was studded thickly with tremendous trees, the trunks of which were enveloped in wreaths of twining plants springing up on every side in luxuriant profusion.

At length we reached a spot which Trevethik declared would suit us admirably. Above our heads hung great branches interlocked like the huge arms of some gigantic monsters. So dense was the foliage that not a single glimpse could be obtained of the sky beyond. On all sides we were shut in by giant trees, while in a few minutes we were able to gather enormous heaps of fern-like vegetation, which formed a luxurious couch.

"Now, Philip," I said, as we nestled down in our comfortable beds, "do not forget I am still ignorant of the events which led to my rescue."

"It was a very simple matter, Mr. Foster," he began. "When I heard the report of your rifle, you may be sure I hastened at once in the direction from which the sound came. Just as you were being hurried off I reached the little path. It went against the grain to let them hustle you away without attempting a rescue, but I knew that single-handed I could accomplish nothing. So turning back with a heavy heart I beat up Dennis and the niggers, and we all went back to the camp.

"The captain was in great distress when he heard what had happened, and seemed terribly put out. 'You do not know Guardiola,' he said, when I hinted that they would soon set you at liberty; 'and Guardiola is in command at Rivas. If Corral were chief, I should not fear much; but you might as well expect a tigress to suckle a young kid, as to obtain mercy from the Tiger of Honduras.'

"All this was rather alarming, and I asked him what it was he feared. You can imagine my feelings when he replied, 'Guardiola will have him hanged on the nearest tree.'

"'What's that?' shouted Dennis, who was there with me—'hang Mr. Foster? Sure, now, they won't begin the ceremony until we're there to assist them with a little music.' The captain was greatly perplexed, I could see. If he had followed his own impulse, he would have marched his handful of men straight away to Rivas; but of course he was bound to obey his orders. At last Dennis suggested that he and I should start out again. 'And if we should be so unfortunate as to lose our way and find ourselves in Rivas,' he said, 'we will tell this terrible general that we have just dropped in, in a friendly way, to young Mr. Foster's wake. He'll be mighty plazed at that, ye'll see.'

"Well, the end of it was the captain gave his consent, and we started in pursuit. As long as we kept to the track in the forest, there was little danger; but directly we reached the outskirts of the town, we found it impossible to proceed. All day long we lay hidden in the wood, not daring to show ourselves, yet tormented with fears for

your safety. As soon as darkness fell, we crept out; but even under cover of the night, we narrowly escaped falling into the enemy's hands. Clearly they do not mean to be surprised, for I really believe three-fourths of the army must have been on outpost duty. However, in spite of their precautions, we managed to steal unseen into the plaza and secrete ourselves. While we were debating how best to find out where they had placed you, we heard the tramp of a body of troops and spied you in the midst.

"Dennis was for making a rush and trusting to luck for getting away afterwards, but I thought it better to wait. So we let them pass, and followed cautiously. While you were inside the building, we remained concealed on the opposite side of the street, anxiously wondering what would happen next. The time appeared very long, but I calculated that no harm would happen to you while you remained inside. At last the door opened, and when you came out I judged by the murmurs of the soldiers that you were not to be put to death—at least just then. Still we dogged the footsteps of your guard very closely, until they thrust you into the hut and went away. For a long time we could do nothing but lie hidden in the darkness and wait for a favourable opportunity. The spot was alive with soldiers, who passed and repassed continually. Finally, we decided to put off the attempt until after the sentry had been relieved. This, we reckoned would give us a longer time to get away before your flight was discovered; and the rest you know."

"You are a pair of noble men," I cried enthusiastically; "how to repay your kindness I do not know. This is the second time you have saved my life."

"Do you think they really would have harmed you, Mr. Foster?" asked Phil.

"Indeed they would," I answered emphatically. "Had I remained in Rivas until now, I should have stood an extremely good chance of testing the stoutness of Nicaraguan rope. But you shall hear all about it," and I briefly related my adventures, not forgetting to impress strongly upon their minds the value of Luis Pacheco's services.

Dennis laughed heartily at the captain's trick, and Trevethik said earnestly, "They are brave men, Mr. Foster, both our captain and his brother. If ever the opportunity comes, we will show that we do not easily forget a favour. From now this Captain Luis is our friend."

"Amen to that," ejaculated the Irishman fervently; "and now let us go to sleep."

Under the circumstances this appeared exceedingly sensible advice, and turning over I was speedily in the land of dreams.

CHAPTER IX.

MAKING FOR GRANADA.

THE day was far advanced when I awoke refreshed, and found that my comrades had long since been stirring. Dennis had reconnoitred the banks of the river, and reported that there were no signs of the enemy. Trevethik, equally busy, had collected a quantity of fruit, upon which we proceeded to breakfast.

The fare was not very substantial, but our hearts were light, and we made a merry meal. We nearly exhausted Trevethik's store of tortillas, and finished with a small piece of chocolate as a kind of dessert. For the possession of this last delicacy we were indebted to my late jailer, who carried a cake of this nourishing edible in the pocket of his tunic.

After breakfast my comrades lit their pipes, and we began seriously to discuss the situation. That it was impossible to traverse in safety the country which separated us from our friends we all agreed. The Serviles, anxious to watch Colonel Walker's movements, were out in strong force, and, as my companions had discovered, were guarding every foot of the road. Had they acted according to the

laws of all civilized nations, we would have run the risk of being taken prisoners; but my experience taught us that capture meant death.

"If we could be sure of what the colonel intends to do," Trevethik began, "I should advise remaining in the neighbourhood of Rivas for a few days. We are fairly comfortable here, and we cannot starve."

"Is not his object abundantly clear?" I inquired. "He will give battle to the Serviles at Rivas, and drive them before him to Granada."

"I hardly agree with you, Mr. Foster. The colonel is not only a stout fighter, but a man of many resources. If he can gain his end without bloodshed, he will do so."

"He is as cunning as an old fox," chimed in Dennis, "and up to every move on the board."

"Then what do you suggest?" I asked, puzzled. "To me the matter appears very simple. Granada is confessedly the object of his attack, and to reach it he must defeat Guardiola's army. All the country would then lie open before him, and when the routed Serviles had fled we could rejoin our friends."

Trevethik did not answer at once; he was turning the matter over in his mind. "No, Mr. Foster, it will not do," he said finally. "The design is too straightforward, and just what the enemy no doubt expects. Suppose Guardiola to be defeated, he will retreat a few miles and break up his army into small detachments. His men know the country well, and can turn their knowledge to the best advantage. An ambush here, a night surprise there; a

few stragglers cut off on every march,—that would be their plan, and depend upon it the colonel would lose the half of his men. Moreover, the enemy would reach Granada before him, and help to strengthen the defence."

"Do you imagine then that he will endeavour to slip past by a night march?"

"No; he will fight them and fall back."

"Then it will be like the tiger," said Dennis, "in order that he may make the more deadly spring."

Trevethik smiled. "So I think, but still we may be mistaken."

"I confess," I interrupted somewhat impatiently, "that your remarks puzzle me. You admit he is aiming at Granada, but how he is to reach that town you do not make clear."

"Do you know where Granada is situated?" Trevethik asked.

"Yes; on the western shore of Lake Nicaragua."

"And four days' march along the transit road will bring him to the border of the same lake."

This remark afforded me a glimpse of what was passing in Trevethik's mind, but still there appeared to be one serious objection. "Our men cannot walk on the water," I urged, "and the colonel has no vessel."

"Ah! Mr. Foster," Trevethik observed with a smile, "you do not know the colonel yet; he would build a ship if it were necessary for his purpose. But if it is his intention to go to Granada by water, you may be sure he has made all the necessary arrangements."

"In that case it will be useless for us to remain here."

"More than useless—it will be positively dangerous."

This possible scheme which Trevethik roughly outlined caused me to reflect. In my own mind I had reckoned upon the defeat and flight of Guardiola's forces, followed by the immediate advance of the filibusters. In such an event our safety would have been assured. If Trevethik's notion, however, proved correct—and he had had many opportunities of studying the colonel's character—to remain in our present position would be to invite a certain and speedy capture.

When the matter was submitted to Dennis he showed no hesitation whatever, but instantly expressed himself as of Trevethik's opinion. "That's his game," he said, "for certain—the sly old fox. He'll give the niggers a good drubbing, and while they're rubbing their broken heads he'll slip off up the lake and be in Granada before they know he has gone."

"Meanwhile, we shall be left here stranded," remarked Trevethik thoughtfully.

"Cast ashore," said Dennis with a rueful countenance, thinking of our last night's experience.

"We must make for Granada," I suggested, "either overland or by water. The lake cannot be far distant. By skirting the shore we may meet with a boat which will carry us to Granada."

After a little further discussion this plan was agreed upon, and we immediately prepared to put it into practice. At the very outset, however, a new difficulty confronted us.

The wood in which we were was absolutely impassable. Not only were the trees close together, but every inch of space between was choked with creeping plants, forming a living network of vegetation, through which it was well-nigh impossible to force one's way.

A suggestion from Trevethik that we should recross the river and advance along the opposite bank, which was comparatively open, met with strong opposition from Dennis.

In the first place he urged the extreme likelihood of being carried away by the current.

"Last night," he said, "we acted rightly in risking it, for we were flying from a worse danger. To-day the circumstances are reversed; we shall be tempting death by drowning in order to give our enemies a better chance of hanging us. No, thank you, Mister Philip; it's pretty clear a man need not be born in Ireland to be an Irishman."

"Upon my word, Phil," I cried laughingly, "I believe he has you there. Still it is evident we must get out of this wood by some means. Suppose we force the river into our service. It is not deep near the bank, and the daylight will enable us to avoid the sharp stones."

Dennis contorted his features into a comical grimace, but he gave his consent nevertheless, and we proceeded to descend the rocky bank leading to the river. We chose the spot at which we had landed on the previous night for our descent, pausing on the friendly boulder to take off our boots and stockings and to roll up our trousers.

"Keep a good look-out," Phil warned us impressively,

"and if you see what appears to be a sunken log, steer clear of it. Many of these rivers swarm with alligators, though, as a rule, they keep nearer to the mouth than this."

The water was bitterly cold, the clouds black and lowering, and we could not always avoid the sharp rocks that cut our bare feet. Notwithstanding all these disadvantages, however, there was something not unpleasing in our novel journey.

The scene possessed something of grandeur which impressed us despite our physical discomforts. The rush of the waters, the appearance of strange fishes such as we had never before seen, our very loneliness in this wild stretch of nature, all contributed to our feeling of awe.

Overhead the great trees of the forest, covered with fantastic parasitic plants, and reaching to the very brink of the river, threw their mighty branches. Birds, rich in hue and of glorious plumage, flitted hither and thither from bough to bough. From time to time we caught glimpses of their beauteous colours, flashing out for an instant like some fairy star. The wealth of colour they possessed was to me a constant source of wonder and delight, so that, forgetful of my own desperate condition, I paused many times to feast my eyes on the marvellous sight. Gorgeous red and delicate blue, orange-yellow and flaming crimson, every tint and shade of the rainbow seemed to be gathered together in that primeval forest.

We had other neighbours, too, no less interesting in their way. Troops of chattering, grinning, antic-cutting monkeys accompanied us on our march. Monkeys of every age and

apparently every species were there — grave patriarchs, whose years should have taught them better, mothers carrying their babies, children just released from the maternal care and solicitude, monkeys in every stage from infancy to senility. And what a merry tribe they were!

Dennis, who had no eye for the beauty of the birds, and who could scarcely distinguish a macaw from a parrot, roared with laughter at their queer capers.

Chattering and screaming, they glided from bough to bough, from tree to tree; now swinging head downward from the dizzy height of a topmost branch, now scampering nimbly off into the recesses of their leafy homes. They reminded me of a school of roguish children out for a Saturday ramble, and attended by the masters, who found it difficult to keep order amongst their madcap charges.

But they were wary and cunning, and not unmindful of possible danger. In the midst of their maddest gambols they did not lose sight of us; and once, when Dennis raised his rifle in sport, we heard ring out a warning scream from some great-grandfather of the party. Immediately, and as if by magic, the whole troop disappeared, leaving not a solitary animal in sight.

Either, however, their fears were quickly dissipated, or curiosity proved stronger than the sense of distrust, for very soon they came peeping one by one to reconnoitre, and, finding no cause for alarm, once more emerged into full view.

One little animal I noticed in particular, as it furnished me with the occasion for a hearty laugh. It had a white

face, and a streak of white running down the centre of its breast gave it an odd appearance. It had sharp cunning eyes and an indescribable air of mischief on its countenance. Two or three times I saw it slyly pinch its companions, all the while assuming such an innocent look that the unhappy victims were completely deceived.

On the last occasion, however, it was caught in the very act, and only escaped instant chastisement by a rapid flight from its enraged adversary. It now turned its undivided attention to us. Scrambling down to the edge of the bank, it began to play such antics that both Dennis and I stopped to watch. Presently we heard a sharp cry from above, and, looking up, saw a venerable grandsire vainly endeavouring to attract the notice of our little friend. The merry-andrew, however, gave no heed, but continued its performance. Then the venerable one came down in a slow, dignified way, and advancing to its misguided junior, gave it a hard blow on the side of the head. "White-face," as Dennis had named it, nearly fell into the river, so hearty was the whack, but was immediately knocked upright again by a sounding smack on the other cheek. Sobered by this vigorous castigation, the little mountebank bade us a sorrowful farewell, and made one of two in a silent and solemn procession to the rest of the troop. Here, I imagine, it must have been handed over to the executioner, as we saw it no more.

"Faith!" ejaculated Dennis, "that owld gintleman is a regular martinet; I should like to see him on parade. I'll wager now he makes a fine show."

Leaving this remark unanswered, I pressed on after Philip, who by this time was some distance in advance; and Dennis, still keeping one eye on the antics of the monkeys, followed.

The surface of the country now began to alter. The trees grew less and less dense, until finally we were enabled to quit our watery course and proceed once more on dry land. This last expression must, however, be taken in a figurative sense, as the ground, which was composed of a white clay, had been churned into a sticky mass by the recent rains.

Our rate of progression now became exceedingly slow; for at almost every step we sank to our shoe-tops in mud, and two or three pounds weight of clay attached to the feet does not form the most effective aid to a rapid gait.

To add to our misfortunes, the rain, without the least warning, suddenly poured down in one continual torrent, and in less time than the words take to write we were soaked. No description of an ordinary English storm would afford the slightest idea of this deluge. It was as if the heavens consisted of one immense bath, which had been overset and the contents precipitated to the earth beneath.

In England we are accustomed to speak of rain-drops, but here there were no drops. The torrent was literally one continuous wall of water, so strong that it nearly dashed us to the ground, and made breathing a difficulty.

The thunder-claps appalled us by their violence, and the vivid flashes of lightning were awful to behold.

At the first bursting of the storm we were near a clump of brushwood, and to this we made our way, crawling under it for whatever shelter it would afford. Here, on the sodden earth, we lay for over an hour watching the lightning as it fell in every direction on the forest trees we had so lately passed. Many of them were struck with terrific force, and fell with a tremendous crash against those still standing in their immediate neighbourhood.

When at length the fury of the storm abated, enabling us to crawl from our shelter, we must have looked pitiable objects. The water ran from our clothes in streams of a clayey hue, as every article of our attire was plentifully bedaubed with mud.

In addition to this, Dennis, in pushing his way under the brushwood, had been fearfully scratched by the sharp spiny thorns of which the bushes were partly composed, and the blood from these cuts mingling with the clay gave him a gruesome appearance.

Darkness, too, was setting in. We were growing faint from lack of food, and altogether were in perilous plight.

"There is no help for it," exclaimed Trevethik sturdily; "we must push on as best we can; we cannot remain here all night."

For my own part I was so weary and miserable that I would gladly have crept back again into the wretched hole from which we had just emerged; but Trevethik's advice was sound, and I could not offer any opposition.

The country now became extremely wild. There was no approach to a track anywhere; and as the night fell, the

surrounding objects became blurred and indistinct, assuming to our excited imaginations uncouth and fantastic forms. We plodded on nevertheless without a murmur, until once again the nature of the ground altered. The stiff, tenacious clay gradually gave place to a succession of rocky hollows, and at one of these Trevethik halted.

A huge boulder projecting well over from the summit formed a sort of unfinished chamber, and here we determined to pass the night. Indeed we could do no other, since it was no longer possible to see our way. The ground under the rock was comparatively dry, and crouching closely together for the sake of the added warmth, we lay down.

Trevethik had taken the precaution to save a supply of fruit, left from our morning meal, and this he now distributed. I was far too fatigued to finish my portion. My eyes were heavy with sleep, and leaving the other two conversing in low tones I turned my face to the wall and dropped into a slumber, nor did I waken again until Trevethik called me by name.

It was now broad daylight, and from the summit of our protecting boulder we could scan the country for miles around. Behind us lay the dense forest; to the right the river which we had crossed in our flight from Rivas; to our left an unbroken succession of rocks and hollows; while straight in front the country appeared as if it had been methodically planted with small trees.

The distance was too great for us clearly to distinguish them, but the same idea flashed into the minds of us all.

Trees meant fruit, perhaps some animal that we might kill and cook, and almost certainly an abundance of birds. Without wasting words we began our journey, and very soon I perceived that we were approaching a tract of land called in the district a *jicaral*, from the jicaral trees which overspread it.

These trees are better known by their name of the calabash tree, and in some parts of the country they form an object of cultivation. The fruit is surrounded by a hard shell, which is found extremely useful in manufacturing vessels for domestic use. The smaller kinds are made into drinking-cups or *jicaras*, while from the larger varieties are constructed basins, termed by the Nicaraguans *guacales*.

Very soon we left the rocky ground behind, and once more found ourselves in a muddy slough. Here the clay was of a black colour and made a stiffer paste, causing us even greater difficulties in advancing. The trees, which stretched away in front of us for miles, were quite small compared with the monarchs of the forest under which we had recently found shelter, and their numerous branches were long and slender. The leaves, too, were narrow and scanty; but twined round the branches were a great number of parasitic leaves, striped in red and green colours, presenting a pretty appearance.

The spaces between the trees were covered with rank coarse grass and low bushes of the aroma mimosa, with the sweet-scented yellow catkins.

Suddenly Trevethik paused and extended his hand in a warning gesture. Creeping up noiselessly, we beheld a

sight which brought a joyful smile to our faces and caused Dennis to pat his stomach gratefully. Only a few yards away, with her head turned from us, and busily seeking the fallen fruits from the calabash trees, stood a cow. Black in colour, and, compared with the mountains of beef which grace Smithfield at Christmas-tide, diminutive in size, she appeared to us the very perfection of the bovine race.

Glorious visions of broiled and roast, of juicy steaks, of tender sirloin, of rich appetizing gravies to be drunk from the calabash shells, flitted before us. So strongly indeed did the Irishman's imagination run riot that he could no longer contain himself, but uttered a deep-drawn sigh of grateful appreciation.

At the unwonted sound our unconscious victim raised her head in mild surprise, and half-turning presented a favourable mark for Trevethik's rifle. Crack! a half-smothered cry, and a score of dinners lay on the ground waiting to be cooked, and, more interesting still, to be eaten.

We did not even wait to congratulate the marksman on his success, but began to hurry on with our preparations for the forthcoming banquet. To Philip was deputed the office of butcher, while Dennis and I undertook the necessary task of making a fire; and so difficult did this prove that I began to fear our steaks would be very under-done indeed.

Nothing, however, daunted my companion, and by dint of careful searching we finally managed to gather a sufficient supply of fuel which was not too wet to kindle.

I have assisted at many delicate operations since then;

more than once my life has hung trembling in the balance; but never shall I forget that supreme moment when Dennis applied the light to the heap. How we hung over it! With what intense interest we regarded that first tiny spark upon which our hopes were centred! How gently we fanned it with our breath, and waved our hands to and fro with a soft caressing motion!

Now as I sit comfortably in my cushioned chair, watching the long forks of flame leap merrily up the chimney, and see the ruddy glow of a bright coal fire blazing cheerily in the grate, there comes back vividly to my mind that melancholy scene in the Central American jicaral:—

The rows of trees with their green and red striped parasites; the sodden ground; the slaughtered cow; Trevethik, giant-like, bedaubed with clay, and his brawny arms imbrued with blood, bending eagerly to his work. Then at a little distance those two other pitiable, mud-plastered figures, stooping low over the pile of damp firewood, their eager faces alternately lightened by fitful gleams of hope or clouded with despair.

It was truly a desperate struggle, characterized on our part by the patriarch's virtues and the wiles and cunning of primeval man. We were rewarded at last. A little thin spiral column of smoke mounted lazily into the air. It was very slight, but it was smoke, and Dennis, grasping my hand, exclaimed excitedly, "Begorra, Mr. Foster, we've done it now. Don't ye know the old saying, 'Where there's smoke there's fire'?—Hurry up, Trevethik darlint; I reckon we will manage without sauce for once in our

lives." Then as Philip redoubled his exertions his eyes wandered from the plump carcass to the struggling fire, which he regarded with a kind of fatherly pride.

In case my young readers may be tempted to accord me an honour not justly mine, I must honestly confess that to Dennis is due all the credit. His was the master-mind. My share was simply that of the labourer who does as he is bidden without comprehending what will be the result of his actions.

I must not dwell upon the feast which followed our exertions. After all, its great merit lay probably in our own sharp hunger, which did not permit us to criticize it too severely. I should not, however, like to experience the fate of the luckless landlord who should present his customers with strips of meat cooked after Trevethik's manner on that memorable day. Some pieces were scorched and dried so as to resemble charred leather, while others, raw and red, had scarcely been touched by the flames. All alike were full of a strong, undisguised smoky flavour, which under more favourable circumstances might not have been particularly tempting.

We did not grumble, however, but sat gratefully around our fire, devouring the smoky viands as happily as though we had been favoured guests at a Lord Mayor's banquet.

After our meal was ended, Trevethik selected the finest of the remaining pieces and made them up into parcels. Thus equipped, we put out our fire and trudged on afresh. Here and there we saw skeletons of animals — horses, cows, and mules—which had died in the jicaral owing

probably to their inability to obtain water during the dry season.

During our progress through the jicaral we found that the cow upon whose remains we had just dined was by no means a solitary specimen. At intervals we passed many others, but made no attempt to molest them.

Towards nightfall the ground became more open, the trees less and less numerous, until finally we emerged into a broad, undulating plain dotted with orange and lemon trees. We now pushed on at a more rapid pace, in the hope of securing a place of shelter before darkness fell.

Nor were we disappointed. An hour's sharp walking brought us to a patch of cleared ground, at the back of which we could just distinguish what appeared in the gathering gloom to be a fair-sized house.

As usual in all matters of doubt, we halted and held a council of war. What ought to be done? Should we remain all night in the open, or brave a possible danger in making our presence known to the inmates of the dwelling? There was of course a certain element of risk attached to this latter course; but, on the other hand, the prospect of another night with the sky for our canopy and the wet ground for a couch was by no means tempting, and we resolved to seek shelter under the enemy's roof.

"After all," observed Trevethik, "the danger is not very great. Should these people prove ill disposed, we are three strong men, well armed, and able to render a good account of ourselves."

As it happened, our apprehensions of possible danger

were altogether groundless. The only inmates of the house were a half-breed and his wife, who regarded us with an air of stupid indifference.

The man listened to the speech which I had prepared, but it was plain that he did not more than half understand it. Then in a vile compound of bad Spanish and unintelligible Indian he answered that we were welcome to remain for the night.

The woman prepared us a greasy mess of rice, which we ate with the aid of a leathery tortilla, and washed down by draughts of steaming hot coffee.

I tried to engage her husband in conversation; but owing to the difficulty each had in making himself understood, it was only a partial success. I gathered that he was aware of the war then in progress, but that, with Mercutio, he could exclaim, "A plague o' both the houses." One piece of intelligence I gleaned, however, which caused Trevethik to look troubled. There had been desperate fighting in the north; our allies had been totally defeated with heavy loss, and the victorious Serviles, flushed with success, were rapidly marching southward, with the openly-expressed intention of annihilating Colonel Walker and his meagre force.

"That's a serious matter, Mr. Foster," Phil said blankly, "both for the colonel and ourselves;" and I could not but agree with him, as our safety depended upon our finding the filibusters in possession of Granada.

Dennis, however, laughed at our apprehensions. "Most likely it's all a pack of lies," he said contentedly; "anyway

there will be time enough to discuss it in the morning. Let us go to sleep," and curling himself up on the floor he closed his eyes lazily.

Our taciturn host and his wife betook themselves to an inner room, and Trevethik and I soon followed our companion's example.

We rose early in the morning, and, having eaten a hearty breakfast, accompanied by some more hot coffee, prepared to resume our travels. Chary of speech as the half-breed had proved on the previous night, he was still more reserved now, and spoke only in monosyllables.

With regard to our best route he either would or could tell us nothing, and after wasting half an hour in a vain endeavour to obtain information, we were compelled to abandon the attempt. The night's shelter, aided by the hot food, had done us considerable good, and it was in high spirits that we left our surly but hospitable entertainers.

Still steering to the north-east, we soon perceived abundant signs of the presence of man, and remembering the half-breed's story, we proceeded with extreme caution. It was early in the afternoon when we caught our first glimpse of the noble expanse of water called Lake Nicaragua, and we paused for a few moments on the brow of a hill to gaze at it in admiration.

"Now," exclaimed Dennis, whose ideas were of a practical nature, "if we can only secure a boat, half our troubles will be over."

"If Walker has captured Granada," added Trevethik thoughtfully.

"If not," responded Dennis, "we must take it ourselves. I have had enough of roaming at large through this delightful country."

Turning northward we walked several miles along the shore of the lake without meeting with any signs of human beings. Suddenly Dennis exclaimed in a stage whisper, "Look! there is a boat heading straight for the shore;" adding jocularly, "Perhaps the colonel has sent it for us."

"*Quien sabe?*" I replied, in the long drawling tone affected by the natives. "Let us not be too rash, however; that may spoil everything."

Hidden behind a clump of gorse, we watched intently as the canoe, propelled by two pairs of arms, came swiftly forward. A third man sat in the stern of the queer craft, and a glance showed me the occupants were of Indian blood. They were entirely naked, save for a cloth worn round the loins; and as they advanced near enough to be distinguished plainly, we could see that they were pure Indians, and of a very wretched type.

They handled their oars exceedingly well, and shot the boat with unerring precision into a little creek, where one of them stepped on shore and made it fast in a workmanlike manner.

Meanwhile we had been cautiously discussing how best to proceed. Dennis was in favour of capturing the boat and pushing off by ourselves. We could easily keep within reach of the shore, he argued, and when night fell, run the boat into one of the numerous little bays, there to await the breaking of the dawn.

Trevethik preferred a different course. The Indians, he urged, could afford us valuable assistance. They knew the lake well, could navigate its waters in the dark if necessary, and could certainly guard us from any sudden peril that might arise *en route*. He had another reason also, which was so characteristic of the man that I cannot omit it.

"By retaining the services of the Indians," he said, "we shall be able to secure them in possession of their boat, which otherwise they must inevitably lose, and it certainly looks as if they could ill afford that."

To this argument Dennis yielded, and Trevethik rapidly sketched a plan of action. It was decided that while he and Dennis confronted them, I should steal round to the boat and cut off their escape in that direction.

As Trevethik had predicted, so it happened. Terrified by the sight of the two filibusters, the Indians turned and made for the boat, where I was ready to receive them.

"Stay!" I cried rapidly in Spanish; "we will not harm you. We wish you to take us to Granada," and I pointed first northward, and then to the canoe.

They stood with folded arms gazing alternately at us and at each other; then one of them inclined his head, and made a motion that they understood and would obey our commands.

"Be careful," whispered Dennis; "they are slippery customers. You and Trevethik get into the boat first."

Feeling that this was good advice we stepped in, followed by the silent Indians, and lastly by Dennis, who cast the boat off; and passing swiftly down the narrow inlet, we were soon on the bosom of the broad lake.

CHAPTER X.

A HAPPY REUNION.

"HURRAH! wake up, Mr. Foster, wake up! here's a glorious sight to open your eyes upon! May the saints be praised, but it's grand! Phil, me boy, shake hands, though it's sorry I am we were not here to help in it."

Very lazily I opened my eyes and yawned, wondering where I was and what had happened. By degrees the events of the few preceding hours came to my mind—the capture of the bongo; the halt in the little shady creek, with Phil mounting guard over the Indians while Dennis and I slept in the bottom of the craft; the start at the first streak of dawn; the resuming of my disturbed slumbers; and now my comrade's triumphant shout.

Dennis spoke truly. From our point of view the sight was worth waking to see. Two or three yards away, her deck crowded with familiar figures, a little steamer lay at anchor; while proudly floating over the city of Granada, the Lone Star flag fluttered bravely in the breeze.

We were instantly recognized, and the hardy sailors came crowding to the vessel's side.

"Ahoy there!" shouted Dennis in nautical phrase; "what ship is that?"

Laughing good-humouredly at the Irishman's sally, one of the men answered, "The Nicaraguan war-ship *Trinidad;* who are you?"

"The *Indian Racer,*" responded Dennis promptly; "Mr. Foster in command. Bear a hand there; we wish to speak with your captain."

A score of willing hands helped us up the vessel's side, and as we gained the deck, the brave fellows cheered vociferously.

The officers now thronged round, wishful to hear our story and congratulate us upon our escape; but, eager to report to the colonel, I made the narrative as brief as possible.

"Ah!" exclaimed young Moody, one of the mates, "the colonel's prophecy was correct after all. 'The lieutenant may be killed,' he said, 'and Trevethik—though I doubt the latter—but Brogan will come back, if it's only one piece at a time. They talk about people with the nine lives of a cat, but Brogan has the lives of nine cats.'"

There was another outburst of laughter at the Irishman's expense, and then they began to ridicule our woe-begone appearance.

"The boys will think you're travelling scarecrows, and hang you up to frighten away the birds, before they discover their mistake," suggested one.

The speaker was not altogether a prepossessing specimen of humanity, so that the Irishman's reply lost none of its

force. "Faith!" he retorted slyly, "I'm thinking it's a good thing you do not make one of our company, or there would be no mistake to discover."

"Bravo, Dennis!" exclaimed the captain, and turning to Trevethik, added, "Take him away, and get the purser to mix you a glass of grog.—Mr. Foster, can I offer you some refreshment and a change of dress before putting you ashore?"

I accepted his invitation to breakfast, but knowing that I had an abundance of clothing with the baggage, I resolved to retain my present attire until after I had seen Colonel Walker.

All this time I had forgotten the Indians, whom I had intended to recompense for their forced labour, and now discovered that, taking advantage of the confusion, they had slipped quietly away.

While I was enjoying the captain's hospitality in the cabin, my comrades were gallantly attacking a plenteous repast spread before them by the purser, proving to every one's satisfaction that their adventures had by no means destroyed their appetites.

After breakfast we bade farewell to our generous hosts, and were put ashore in the captain's boat.

As the commander of the *Trinidad* had hinted would be the case, our appearance created a great sensation, both among the natives and our own companions in arms, the latter flocking eagerly around and converting our entry into a triumphal procession.

The streets, as usual in these Central American cities,

were long, rectangular, and divided by intervening squares, to the largest of which we were hurried along.

This central plaza was very spacious, and the buildings which surrounded it were handsome and imposing.

Before one of them—the Government House—our motley guard drew up, and falling back on either flank left us free to enter. In a long, low room to the right we found Colonel Walker seated at a desk writing.

He rose at our approach, and smiling pleasantly held out his hand. "Welcome, Colin!" he said. "So you have returned to your allegiance and brought back these deserters!"

"The other way about, colonel. Had it not been for these brave men, I should long since have been dangling from a tree at Rivas."

"Ah! is that so? Thanks, Trevethik; thanks, Brogan. You have done me good service; I could ill have spared this lad."

Grasping a hand of each, he spoke a few low earnest words of praise, which brought the blood to their faces in a burning glow. It was marvellous to see what affection this stern, unassuming man inspired in the breasts of his followers. I really believe that from first to last there were scores who would gladly have died, if in dying they could have obtained from him a single word of praise.

Writing an order on a sheet of paper, he handed it to Trevethik, saying, "Take this to the adjutant; he will give you new clothing and your back pay. By the way, do not report yourselves for duty for the next two days; you have well earned a little holiday."

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The Indians made for the boat (p. 156)

"Now, Colin," he continued, as the door closed upon my gallant comrades, "let me learn the history of your adventures."

He listened attentively to my narration of the various incidents which had occurred from the period of our leaving San Juan, only interrupting the story at the account of Don Luis Pacheco's stratagem.

"Pacheco!" he murmured; "any relation to our Pacheco?"

"His brother. Should the time ever come when it lies in your power to repay his generous kindness, I beg that, for my sake, you will do so."

"I will not forget, Colin; rest assured of that."

My account of Trevethik and Brogan's conduct pleased him greatly.

"They are brave men," he said, "and true as steel. They were with me in Sonora. With a thousand such men as these, I could change the whole face of Central America. But you are weary, and will doubtless be glad to discard that dilapidated uniform. I will not detain you longer now, but you will find a place at my table to-night."

I thanked him and withdrew—to run straight into the arms of Don Miguel, who was impatiently awaiting me in the corridor.

"My dear friend," he cried, embracing me enthusiastically, while his eyes filled with joyous tears, "this is indeed a happy day. I have mourned for you as one dead, lost to me for ever; and now I can scarcely restrain my emotion. Come, Colin, my friend, my brother, let me take you to

my quarters. I cannot let you go; I wish to feast my eyes upon you, to hear you talk, to make sure this is a reality, and that my senses are not playing me false."

"But my dress," I urged, pointing to my tattered uniform; "you do not expect me to masquerade in this all day."

"That need give you no anxiety; my servant will attend to everything," and without giving me an opportunity for further remonstrance he hurried me away.

He was indeed overjoyed to see me again; and later on, when I had washed and changed my attire, he begged earnestly that I would tell him the manner of my escape.

"That is of more interest to you than you imagine," I said. "In the first place, I owe my life to a Servile officer. Did you learn the name of the man who took me prisoner?"

"No."

"Yet it is quite familiar, as familiar indeed as your own."

His heightened colour told me that he guessed the secret. Anticipating his question, I continued, "Yes, it was indeed your brother Luis. Had it been any one else, I should instantly have been put to death."

"And he saved you!"

"Then, and after; but you shall hear."

Briefly describing the adventure in the wood, where my unexpected presence spoiled the plans of the Serviles, I hastened on to our arrival at Rivas and my confinement as a prisoner in the hut.

Don Miguel's breath came fast as I told of his brother's

noble behaviour; but when I further related the trick played upon Guardiola, he wrung my hand in delight, and murmured half aloud, "Dear Luis, that was like your own tender self."

"Now," I observed in conclusion, "you have my story, and I am eager to learn the events which have taken place during my absence."

"That is only natural," he replied. "First, however, let me draw your attention to a personal matter which I am sure will please you. I have advanced a step in the service, and am now major, and high in favour with your colonel."

This was good news, and I offered him my hearty congratulations, after which he proceeded with an account of the filibusters' movements.

As Trevethik had conjectured, there had been a desperate engagement, in which Guardiola's troops were utterly defeated, and driven back with a loss of nearly two hundred killed and wounded. Then the colonel, having been reinforced by fifty recruits, cautiously led his little band to Virgin Bay, on the shores of Lake Nicaragua, where a steamer already lay waiting to receive them. Here, under cover of the night, they silently embarked; and while the Serviles, thinking to entice their enemy into a trap, were swiftly massing their forces on the white transit road, the little vessel was gallantly ploughing the waters of the broad lake.

On board the steamer a complete silence reigned. To avoid detection from the shore the furnaces had been cloaked, and all the lights hidden. Thus in the darkness

the *Trinidad* stole on her way, and no sound was heard save the churning of the waters, or the heavy plash of some huge saurian which had been startled out of its usual equanimity by the approach of this strange monster of the deep.

Now and again the men on board of the vessel would hear the crash made by some jaguar prowling among the orange groves which fringed the lake, and at intervals the silence would be broken by the screech of some night bird seeking its prey. For the rest, all was still, as the daring spirits proceeded on their way.

Meanwhile the inhabitants of the doomed city were holding high carnival. The news which had reached our taciturn host had not been false; a great battle had taken place in the north, and our allies had suffered defeat. Flushed with success, the victors had turned southward, with the intention of joining Guardiola and crushing the filibusters by one decisive blow.

All Granada turned out to welcome and feast the conquerors. The bells of the churches and convents rang out peals of joyful triumph; all day long the city echoed with the booming of the cannon; bonfires blazed merrily from the hills; rockets shot high into the sky; and all was joy and happiness. The citizens, intoxicated with delight, feasted the successful soldiers royally. The choicest banquets were prepared, at which the fiery *aguardiente* flowed more freely than water.

Little wonder that the city was heavy with sleep when, in the grey of the morning, the filibusters, headed by their

gallant colonel, dashed revolver in hand into the central plaza. The surprise was complete. A few rifle shots here and there were discharged by the half-awakened soldiers, but there was no real opposition, and in half an hour the proud city of Granada lay at the mercy of a handful of filibusters.

This in effect was the story which Don Miguel told me, and I heard it repeated that night at the colonel's table.

This brilliant capture of Granada had produced a tremendous impression upon the Serviles; and it was an open secret among the American officers that Corral, who had displaced Guardiola at Rivas, had already offered to come to terms.

All the conversation now was about the successful termination of our enterprise; but Pacheco, to whom I confided these remarks, shook his head.

"Only a Nicaraguan can fully realize how appropriately is Ponciano Corral named," he remarked. "Have you never heard of the 'coral'? No? It is the most beautiful and at the same time the most deadly reptile in the country; its bite is death."

"And you suggest?"

"That Ponciano Corral has been well named. He is handsome, as you have seen, and his beauty is equalled by his treachery. The colonel must guard himself; there is no antidote to the coral's venom."

In spite, however, of Don Miguel's apprehensions, matters appeared to run very smoothly. Corral's messengers came and went, and at length it was proclaimed that an agree-

ment had been drawn up which each party was prepared to sign. Our leader was to be appointed commander-in-chief of the Nicaraguan forces; a Liberal president was chosen; while to Corral and his principal friends were given suitable offices.

A day—the twenty-third of October—was selected for the public entry of the Servile army, and once more the city put itself *en fête*. Gaily-coloured bunting waved over private houses and public buildings; joy-bells rang out a merry peal from church and convent alike; salvos thundered from the cannons' mouths in friendly greeting; while every street was lined with the enthusiastic but fickle populace, who cheered as loudly now as when they welcomed the northern force which was to have hurled the filibusters into the sea.

It was a truly brilliant spectacle; though to our Northern eyes the colours were too glaring, and the finery tawdry. Nature, too, seemed as if wishful to add to the brilliancy of the scene, for the day was beautifully fine, and the city was bathed in a flood of glorious sunlight.

In the immense crowd were persons of every rank and age. High-born *caballeros*, lovely Spanish ladies wearing the graceful mantilla, officers, both Servile and Leonese, in their showy uniforms, Indians and half-breeds, negroes, Spaniards of the lower classes, jostled each other and uttered shrill *Bravas!* cheering as vociferously as though they were assisting at some national triumph.

The filibusters, too, who now numbered more than two hundred, formed of themselves an impressive sight. Big

men for the most part, towering above the Nicaraguans, stalwart of frame, with bronzed faces tanned and roughened by constant exposure to the elements, they stood drawn up in ranks with military precision.

Their uniform, such as it was, was both effective and picturesque, and formed a striking contrast to that of the native soldiers. By this time the inhabitants of Granada were familiar with the black slouched hats encircled by the band of red ribbon, the coarse woollen shirts tucked into the wide trousers; and they knew that the long rifle slung across the shoulder, as well as the bowie-knife and revolvers stuck in the leathern belt, were more for use than for show.

But the most striking figure in all that huge crowd, and chiefly because of his simple bearing, was Colonel Walker, the leader of that daring band. He was a superb horseman, and bestrode the noble animal which carried him with an ease and grace that excited the admiration of the most skilled cavaliers. His dress was characteristic of the man. There was no attempt at military display. He was attired in civilian costume, and in his black frock-coat, closely buttoned to the chin, looked like an ordinary gentleman. But the large and rounded forehead, the keen grey eyes, the short thin upper lip and the firm chin told a different story, and it required no badge of office to show that here in very truth was a leader of men.

Surrounded by his staff, he rode slowly through the city, amidst the *Vivas!* of the people, to meet Corral, who advanced in the middle of a glittering cavalcade.

Then side by side, at the head of their men, the two chiefs rode along—Walker upright, with cold, unruffled features; Corral, his face wreathed in smiles, bowing low to his horse's neck, as he acknowledged the ovation which met him.

The Granadinos worshipped Corral. This handsome, dashing, open-handed soldier was their idol, and as he passed along the route a thousand tongues proclaimed his name.

Slowly we wound our way through the excited multitude to the cathedral, where the blessing of the church was to be invoked upon the compact recently made.

The vast building was densely packed with a mass of human beings, who, however, behaved with the utmost decorum, listening attentively to the eloquent sermon preached by Padre Vigil on the blessings of peace.

It was late that evening before I was released from my duties, but once at liberty I hastened to my friend's quarters, eager to express my gratitude to his brother.

The two were sitting close together, conversing pleasantly as I entered. To them, as to so many others, that day had brought good store of joy and happiness.

"Welcome, Señor Foster," Luis exclaimed, speaking in English. "We only require my mother and my sweet Inēz to complete the party. I greatly feared, that day at Rivas, I should never again have the pleasure of greeting you."

Mustering my best Spanish, I replied, "Had Don Luis Pacheco's knowledge of English enabled him to interpret aright my answers to Guardiola, then indeed his fear would have proved but too well founded."

It was in the highest degree amusing to watch the astonishment depicted on the face of the Servile captain as he listened to these words, but his brother soon made him understand the truth.

"Then you must have been aware of Guardiola's remarks," he said. "In that case I congratulate you on your self-control."

"The position was certainly not pleasant, but if you will allow me we will leave that. I wish to take this opportunity of thanking you, as it is most assuredly owing to your daring stratagem that I am still alive."

"You owe me no thanks," he answered lightly. "Besides, the tables may be turned some day, when I may be indebted to your good offices."

"Rather unlikely after to-day's ceremony. Our leaders have buried the hatchet, and now, I presume, we shall immediately begin to turn our swords into ploughshares."

"Are you serious?" he asked; "do you really think the war is at an end? I fear a great disappointment awaits you; the struggle has barely commenced. The blood of many brave men will be shed before this contest is brought to a close."

"What of the treaty which our leaders have ratified and your priests have blessed this very day?"

With a meaning look toward his brother he answered slowly, "When the coral bites, it inflicts death;—but no more of this; let us choose some happier subject. Tell me, Miguel, of the dear ones at home. My eyes ache and my heart hungers for a sight of them.—Nay, Señor Foster,

stay with us; you are no stranger to them. You have seen my saintly mother and my beautiful sister; you are Miguel's trusted friend; and one day, I trust, you will feel an interest in me, even though I follow the fortunes of the Granadinos."

"We English do not make use of many words," I said, "but the friendships we form are none the less binding, and I am proud of the friendship of Luis Pacheco."

Shortly afterwards two or three young Leonese officers who knew Luis entered, and the conversation becoming general, I withdrew to my own quarters, as I had a spell of duty before me in the early morning.

CHAPTER XI.

UNEARTHING A CONSPIRACY.

THE news of the capture of Granada swiftly spread throughout the length and breadth of the country, and was not long in reaching the United States, where it produced a great impression, acting both to our benefit and to our disadvantage.

A large number of men, utterly mistaking the character of our leader, and failing to understand the motives which guided him, imagined that Nicaragua would now be given over to plunder. Scores of these, many of them absolutely worthless, eagerly enrolled themselves as volunteers, and were sent on as quickly as possible by Walker's American agents.

I need scarcely say that for these gentlemen a bitter disappointment was in store. No discipline could be sterner than that enforced by the new commander-in-chief of the Nicaraguan forces, and no undue favour was shown to the American contingent. Garrison, patrol, and outpost duty, drills and parades, kept every individual fully employed; while all attempts at robbery or pillage of the natives were put down with an iron hand.

Strictly abstemious himself, the general permitted no drunkenness; gambling, too, was prohibited amongst the members of the Falange; and woe betide the unhappy soldier discovered breaking either of these rules!

For several days I was kept busy writing dispatches, copying letters, and attending to the correspondence generally, so that I had little time to dwell upon the words of warning uttered by both Miguel and Luis Pacheco.

Nor did there seem to be any cause for uneasiness. The people apparently were heartily reconciled to the new order of things, and many even of the Servile officers were loud in their praise of the behaviour of our troops. Life was sacred, property inviolate, and no one with a just cause for complaint was ever sent away without redress.

Judge then of my surprise when one evening Trevethik knocked at the door of my room, and, in response to my invitation, entered, looking profoundly anxious.

"Nothing amiss, I trust?" I exclaimed, as, closing the door carefully, he came over to where I sat.

"I fear there is a great deal amiss," he answered gloomily, "and I have come to ask your advice. But first tell me your opinion of that general the people cheered so much the other day. Do you think he is to be trusted?"

I confess that it considerably perplexed me how to answer this question. From my own personal knowledge I could not doubt Corral's good faith, yet at the same time it was impossible to ignore the sentiments expressed by such a keen observer as Luis Pacheco.

Trevethik noticed my hesitation and interpreted it

aright. "Ah!" he said, "I understand. Your opinion of this gentleman is much the same as mine, but you do not care to speak without proof. Unless I am considerably out in my reckoning, you need not be much longer without sufficient evidence to show that he is a traitor."

"This is serious, Trevethik," I replied; "it behoves us to be careful. Remember that General Corral is a member of the government, and possesses Colonel Walker's confidence."

The filibuster smiled grimly. "Excuse me, Mr. Foster, if I do not agree with the latter part of your statement. I fancy the colonel would think twice before giving his confidence to this Mr. Corral."

"At any rate we must act with caution. What is it you suspect?"

"Treachery; but of what kind we have yet to find out. You know that Dennis and I have a sort of roving commission to scour the town at night, in order to keep an eye on the movements of our men. I do not know if you have seen young Mooney; he's one of the new hands, and a precious scamp too. There will be mischief through him one of these days, I'm reckoning. But I'm keeping you from the story. Last night we gave a glance into a tumble-down shanty at the other end of the town, though we scarcely expected to find any one there belonging to the Falange. The room was a long one, filled with benches, at which a number of men were drinking and gambling. The place was thick with the smoke from their cigars, and I was turning away, when Dennis drew my attention to young Mooney. He was seated about

half-way up the room, engaged in earnest conversation with a half-breed. Whispering to Dennis to remain at the door, I slipped quietly along without attracting notice, until I got quite close to my men. The half-breed was talking in broken English, which he helped out with a few words of his own, and Mooney was listening attentively. I could not catch what they said, but I will swear I heard 'Corral' and 'Walker' from the half-breed, and Mooney said something about 'worth a lot of money.' However, just then he caught sight of me; and I knew they had been plotting mischief, his face took such a guilty look. Of course I did not take any notice, only told him he was under arrest, and ordered him to follow me. For a moment he looked ugly, and I thought there would have been trouble; but the half-breed threw him a meaning glance, and he came out quietly. Turning him over to Dennis, I stole back and waited for the native, who soon finished his liquor and left the room. After a rapid glance up and down the street, and seeing no one—for I was well hidden—he pulled his hat over his eyes and slouched off. With a good deal of trouble I managed to track him until he disappeared in the courtyard of General Corral's house. This I thought very suspicious, and from what Dennis has since told me I am certain my suspicions were well founded. Young Mooney, it appears, was extremely angry, and, being excited by the spirit he had drunk, said a great deal more than he probably intended. He talked wildly about some mysterious influence, hinting broadly that a time would come when he

and Dennis would change places. That is the story, Mr. Foster; what do you propose to do?"

I sat and reflected. What ought I to do? Trevethik's information was very vague, yet I felt half inclined to believe with him that it pointed to treachery. The position was a delicate one in whichever way I acted. To accuse Corral on such slender grounds would be manifestly unjust; but to take no advantage of this discovery might involve us all in ruin.

Presently I determined upon my course of action. Bidding Trevethik await my return, I sought an interview with the colonel, who was fortunately disengaged.

"Well, Colin," he said pleasantly, "what is the matter?"

"I am in rather a difficult position," I answered, "and require your advice. A chance discovery has placed me in possession of information which may or may not lead to a revelation of some treachery. At present the whole affair is so vague that to give you any particulars would be unfair to the principal person indicated, yet it would be foolish to ignore the matter altogether."

"Never commit the mistake of despising trifles," he said. "Follow up your clue, and should it lead to anything let me know. Take what assistance you may require, but do not run into unnecessary danger."

I thanked him, and returned to Trevethik, who was waiting patiently. Telling him to find Dennis and meet me at the gate, I hastily completed my arrangements and followed him.

My idea was to have Corral's residence watched, but in the first place I thought it well to pay a visit to the shanty of which Trevethik had spoken.

Mooney was still under arrest; but the native, ignorant of this, would probably seek him in his old haunt, where we might possibly gather a little information.

Sending Dennis to take up a position near General Corral's house, I walked on swiftly with Trevethik through the half-deserted street until we reached the shanty.

Many of the filibusters were still abroad, so that our presence excited no comment, and slipping into the crowded room we secured a seat without remark.

Presently Trevethik touched my arm and whispered, "There is the man; he is looking this way, as if expecting some one."

Following the direction of my comrade's gaze, I saw a swarthy man, half Indian, half Spanish. He was rather under the average height, of a light, spare frame, but with an air of combined boldness and cunning. He was evidently awaiting some one's arrival, and from time to time glanced impatiently toward the door. Presently, as if his patience was exhausted, he walked slowly down the room and into the street.

At the same time I caught sight of one of Miguel Pacheco's men, and bidding Trevethik follow the half-breed, I crossed over and spoke to him.

"Good evening, señor," he said; and in answer to my question, continued, "Yes, I know the person of whom you speak. They call him Don Garcia; he is a Servile,

and bitterly opposed to the Leonese. He is a dangerous man, and some day will show his teeth; at present, thanks to the brave señor and his companions, he is powerless. Still his time may come. *Quien sabe?*"

"Ah, who indeed?" I answered. "I suppose he is well known to the Servile chiefs?"

"He is a chief, though it suits his purpose to frequent such haunts as these. Next to Guardiola and Ponciano Corral, he is the most important."

"Do they recognize him?"

The man shrugged his shoulders suggestively. "The Tiger of Honduras and he hunt in company, and where Garcia is, there is mischief. But the señor will excuse me; it is not good to talk of such matters in a public place. The señor may be a good shot and a clever fighter, but a knife in the back speaks without being answered."

I nodded and withdrew, convinced that Trevethik's surmise was correct; there was trouble brewing, and it behoved us to be on the alert.

No figure was in sight when I stepped into the street; but knowing Trevethik would not let his man escape, I made straight for Corral's residence, where Dennis cautiously hailed me.

"What news?" I asked in a whisper.

"Nothing particular, sir. A good many men have passed in yonder one by one, and occasionally one has come out, looked down the road, and returned."

"They are waiting for Garcia," I concluded, and took up my position by the Irishman's side.

In a short time the half-breed, having taken a round-about way, made his appearance from the opposite direction, and stole into the courtyard of the house. Then we heard a low "Hist!" and upon the cry being answered by Dennis, Trevethik joined us.

"The same game," he said quietly; "he has led me half round the town. Mooney's absence has frightened him and roused his suspicions. What are we to do now?"

"Remain here," I answered; "the fright may hurry matters to a crisis. They have been waiting for this man."

For more than an hour we stood patiently in the darkness, not uttering a sound, and only slightly shifting our position in order to relieve our cramped limbs.

Suddenly we heard the sharp click of a latch, and a man carrying a lantern stepped into the road. Having assured himself that all was safe he retired; but in a few seconds the gate was reopened, and through the gloom we could just distinguish the figure of a man on horseback.

Who he was we could not tell, and we were equally at a loss to define his object. Still the whole circumstance appeared extremely suspicious, and I ordered Dennis to follow and, if necessary, challenge him.

The Irishman was a swift runner; but as it happened, there was no need for him to exert himself. The horseman rode very slowly, and did not appear at all anxious to get away. However, he soon passed from our sight, and leaving him to Brogan's care, Trevethik and I continued to watch.

An uneventful half-hour elapsed, when a murmur of

voices came from the courtyard; the gate was pushed open; and we heard the words, "Remember, with your life!"

"With my life, señor," some one replied. The gate was shut, and the noise of approaching footsteps warned us that a second man had issued from the mysterious house.

This added greatly to our perplexity, and I turned to ask Trevethik's advice.

"Follow him," he whispered; "he may have some connection with number one. I will remain here. Hasten; he is walking sharply."

I pressed his hand and crept stealthily from our hiding-place, and only just in time. The man was already swallowed up in the darkness of the night, but the noise of his steps served as a guide. He was indeed walking at a rapid pace, and I hurried forward.

He must have been well acquainted with his route, for he pressed straight on without even a moment's hesitation, and I had much ado to keep up with him. Rather to my surprise, he avoided the town and steered for the open country. This I regretted, as it made my task so much the more difficult. After traversing the broken ground for the distance of perhaps half a mile, I heard a low whistle, to which my unsuspecting guide replied.

Before my astonishment had died out, there came the clatter of a horse's hoofs, and in the darkness I saw dimly the figure of a man leading a horse by the bridle. If this was the rider who recently issued from Corral's house, then Dennis would not be far distant, and I should have aid.

But what was I going to do? To speak truth, I felt very much as though embarked on a wild-goose chase, when all at once an idea, which appeared to solve the problem, flashed into my mind,—the first man was simply a blind for the other; the second was the real horseman. Swiftly my hazy ideas took shape. A horseman, stealing from Granada in the depth of night, must mean a secret messenger, carrying all-important dispatches.

To and from whom? The situation was embarrassing. Suppose, after all, these men had no evil designs, how could I justify the action which I contemplated?

However, the matter was speedily taken from my hands, for an event occurred which compelled me to follow up the adventure. While I was wondering what course to pursue, the two men met. They exchanged a few words, and then the one whom I had followed vaulted lightly into the saddle, and gathered up the reins.

"A prosperous journey," exclaimed the first, "and success to your mission."

"Amen!" responded the other fiercely; "and then, death to these cursed foreigners!"

He shook the reins on the horse's back; but at the same moment a figure sprang from the darkness to the animal's head, and I heard Dennis shout,—

"Get down out of that, me boy, or ye're a dead man."

For answer there rang out the sharp report of the horseman's pistol; and the second man, knife in hand, hurled himself on the Irishman with great force. Luckily I had crept up to within striking distance, and now ensued

an almost indescribable *mêlée.* Disregarding this new antagonist, Dennis held tenaciously to the horse's head, while I threw myself upon the second Servile.

"Shake him off, liftinant, get the beggar clear of me, and I'll settle the cavalryman," Dennis shouted, and I did my best.

Luckily my opponent was a slightly-built man, and the darkness and confusion counterbalanced any superiority in skill he might have possessed. It became simply a matter of brute force, and in this I had the advantage. Clutching him round the waist I pinioned his arms with mine, and tried to lift him from his feet. For a time he struggled desperately, but by degrees his violent exertions grew weaker, until at length, with a crowning effort, I threw him heavily to the ground.

Meanwhile Dennis had received unexpected assistance. The horse, maddened by the noise and uproar, began to plunge and rear, and to kick out in all directions. This performance severely taxed the muscles of the Irishman, but at the same time it caused the trooper to bestow all his attention upon keeping his seat. The contest, however, was too unequal to endure long, and presently the rider, losing his balance, fell with a crash.

"Bedad," exclaimed Dennis, as he patted the now quiet animal, "that taste of a knock will keep our friend aisy and paiceable while I seek Trevethik! Faith, the beggar showed good pluck; he's kilt me with a bullet in me left arm somewhere. What shall I do with the horse, Mr. Foster? I'm thinking ye'll have enough to do minding

them spalpeens, and we must not let the baste loose; it would run back to its stable."

"It's quiet enough now," I answered. "I can hold the bridle with my left hand, and use my revolver with the other if need be. I imagine, though, there is little to fear."

Rolling my prisoner over to the senseless body of his companion, I took the animal's bridle from Dennis, who immediately hurried back to Trevethik.

Turning to my discomfited enemy, I said in Spanish, "Place your weapons on the ground; I wish to speak with you. Can you see the barrel of my revolver?"

"Yes," he growled surlily.

"Well, don't knock your head against it; it might go off, and the consequences would be unpleasant. Have you put your weapons down? Yes, I can see them shine; now sit up and answer my questions. Who are you?"

"General Corral's groom."

"And your comrade?"

"I don't know; he's a stranger to me."

"Do you know who I am?"

"Yes; an officer in La Falange."

"Then you know what to expect if you do not truthfully answer my questions. Now, who is your companion?"

"I do not know," sullenly. "Don Garcia brought him to my master."

"Where was he going in such a hurry?"

The man hesitated; but the muzzle of my revolver

pressing against his cheek (though I could not have shot him for the world) proved a powerful persuader, and he said between his teeth, "To Guardiola."

"Very good, my friend," I replied; "you will find that for once 'honesty is the best policy.' I fear you must come with us, but you will be in no danger."

At this moment the messenger began to show signs of returning consciousness, so that I was not sorry when Dennis and Trevethik put in an appearance.

Handing Corral's groom over to Dennis, I helped Philip to tie the other man on his horse, and afterwards mounted myself. Then in silence we proceeded toward the sleeping city and to the barracks, where, leaving the prisoners under close guard, I sought the colonel.

He was in bed, but instantly granted me an interview; and after listening to my story said gravely, "This is a serious matter, Colin, and must be investigated without delay. Where are your prisoners?"

"In the guard-room with Trevethik and Brogan."

"Send them here under a strong escort, and ask Major Morrell to come to me. Then you and your inseparables had better turn in; you have done enough for one night."

He shook my hand warmly, and as I turned to go, I knew by the smile on his face that he was well pleased with my services.

Having carried out his orders and dismissed my two comrades, I retired to my room, where I was soon enjoying a well-earned rest.

The next morning I discovered that the story of our

adventures of the preceding night had spread far and wide; and on my entrance into the mess-room I was speedily surrounded by a group of excited officers, all eager to learn how much truth existed in the rumours which were so freely circulating.

That the affair was a serious one, and admitted of no delay, was clear from the colonel's vigorous conduct. Already Corral had been seized and lodged safely in prison—a bold stroke, considering the captive's popularity.

After breakfast I strolled into the city. The streets were patrolled by bands of armed filibusters, and by the warlike preparations I gathered that our leaders fully understood how dangerous the situation had become.

The shops were empty, the markets deserted, all business was suspended. The people thronged the roads in little groups, and their faces showed plainly how high the excitement ran. Men talked in fierce whispers and gesticulated violently, pointing now towards the residence of their beloved leader, and now towards the quarters of La Falange.

The voices dropped at the approach of the filibusters, and then rose again more excitedly than ever. Here and there I caught an angry word, and a threat of vengeance if the foreigners should dare to ill-treat the imprisoned general; and I have no doubt that, had it not been for the colonel's wise precautions and skilful disposition of his troops, there would have been an attempt at rescue.

I felt extremely depressed as I walked along the crowded streets, for I greatly feared I had been the means of bring-

ing this man to his death. True, if he suffered, his punishment would be just; but for all that, I wished I had not been the instrument of his downfall.

Unfortunately from the very first his fate was inevitable; the papers found upon his messenger proved his guilt conclusively. To Guardiola he had written imploring his assistance in driving the filibusters from the country; and his letters to other leading men breathed a similar spirit.

There was no possible loophole for escape. The American officers who, at his own request, formed his judges would gladly have spared him; but they were compelled reluctantly to pronounce him guilty, and he was sentenced to death.

The Granadinos were in despair. They begged and entreated, they signed petition upon petition imploring that his life might be spared, but all to no purpose. Walker remained firm. "He is a traitor," he said, in answer to their supplications—"a traitor to me, to you, and his country—and he must die."

The day fixed for his execution, November 7, 1855, came at length, and all the city was early astir. Even then there were many who in their hearts believed that he would be reprieved at the last moment; but as the grim preparations for the tragedy went on, the most sanguine began to despair.

All the morning the spectators continued to assemble, so that when, a few minutes before two o'clock, the doomed man was led forth, the plaza was filled with a mighty concourse of people.

I thought of this same vast crowd, which had so recently gathered together with such a different object. What a stupendous change these few days had effected!

Then every face had been bright and joyous, loud cries of welcome and acclamation rent the air; the joy-bells poured forth volumes of sound from their brazen throats; and all had been life and activity.

How different now! what a terrible contrast! Mute were the bells; the cannons, too, were mute, but ready to belch forth fire and flame, and murderous iron missiles, should the necessity arise. Silent and sad were the spectators, their faces wreathed in gloom, their garments sombre and dreary and devoid of colour.

A low hum of suppressed excitement told that the dashing Ponciano Corral was appearing before their gaze for the last time.

His face was deadly pale, but he held himself erect and walked proudly as befitted a leader of men. At his side paced the good priest Padre Vigil, exhorting his companion earnestly, speaking to him words of mercy and consolation, like a true servant of the all-merciful Father.

Just a fortnight before, clad in his priestly robes, he had blessed with the unction of the Church the treaty, for the breaking of which Ponciano was about to die.

I turned my head aside; I dared not look. Presently there fell on my strained ears the sharp, ringing rifle-blast, followed by a low murmur of pain, so intense that it seemed the expression of a living sentiment leaping from breast to breast, and I knew that all was over.

Yes; there he lay, the red blood flowing from his breast, his limbs already stiffening in the cold embrace of death. The quick flashing eyes would sparkle no more, the sunny smile would never again light up the beautiful face, the merry jest was stilled for ever. The busy brain was at rest at last; no more plots, no more fond ambitions, no more dreams of future power and grandeur, would agitate that restless bosom; rightly or wrongly, Ponciano Corral, the idol of his soldiers, had gone to his account.

Slowly and sadly the populace dispersed, moving reverently away, as though the place had been sanctified by the spirit of the dead man. I did not wonder at their behaviour. He was their leader, their pride, the representative of their ideas, and with all his faults they loved him and deplored his death, though, when the first keen anguish of grief had dulled, they admitted the justice of his punishment.

When the plaza had been cleared and nothing remained to be done, I went back to my room and shut myself in. I had no wish for company, my heart was sad, my thoughts were of a mournful cast, for the tragedy at which I had just assisted affected me powerfully.

Had our enemy died on the battle-field, at the head of his men, it would have been different; but this saddened me, and I wished, in spite of all, that his life could have been spared.

CHAPTER XII.

AN ANCIENT FAITH.

AFTER Corral's execution the town gradually resumed its normal state, and we recommenced our drills and parades, our rifle-practice and manœuvres, which, it must be confessed, I found a trifle wearisome.

However, we had to obey orders; and no doubt the continual exercise kept us in health, as it most certainly prevented the men from getting into mischief.

With each succeeding week our numbers increased; for now that the work was believed to be accomplished, we found many men eager to share in the supposed benefits.

Shortly after the treaty between Walker and Corral, Luis Pacheco, bearing our best wishes and numerous messages to his mother and sister, both from Don Miguel and myself, had departed for Leon.

One morning, shortly after breakfast, his brother came to my room. "Are you on duty to-day, Colin?" he asked.

"No," I answered with a sigh of satisfaction; "thank goodness I am free of that for a time. But why do you ask?"

"There is a survey party going in the steamer to Omotope, and if you care for a trip I can find you a place. A blow on the lake ought to do you good, and the island itself is well worth a visit. But if we are to go we must hasten."

"Thanks!" I exclaimed delightedly; "it was very considerate of you to remember me. I am ready now," and putting on my hat I prepared to accompany him.

"What is the object of the survey?" I inquired as we hurried along; "to what possible use can we put the island?"

My comrade smiled at me curiously. Presently he explained it thus: "It means, my dear friend, that the leader of La Falange is a far-sighted man, and of much greater ability than I had given him credit for. The island is noted for its extreme salubrity, and will make a splendid sanatorium for his wounded soldiers."

"But we have no wounded," I objected; "and now that the fighting is all over, we are not likely to have any."

Pacheco shook his head ominously. "Have you ever heard of a volcano, supposed to be extinct, suddenly belching out fire and flame and boiling lava?" he said. "Well, Nicaragua is similar to such a volcano. To the outer eye everything at present is fair and peaceful. There is ostensibly no danger. The muttered rumbling is stilled. Your leader, however, is aware that this seeming calm is deceptive; that, probably without the slightest warning, there will be a mighty upheaval, and he is making his preparations accordingly."

"Are not your people satisfied?" I asked. "They requested us to come, and we have served them loyally. Of what do they complain?"

"Were we left to ourselves, I should see no danger," he answered. "The country would settle down under the new rule, and all would be well. But that arrangement would not suit our neighbours. They have no desire to see us strong and united, while they remain weak and in a state of chronic anarchy. A prosperous Nicaragua means that our country would become the predominant power in Central America, and perhaps even absorb the other states. How do you think Guardiola would like that? And the Costa Ricans? No, my friend, believe me, there will yet be a fearful struggle before peace dawns upon my unhappy country, and Colonel Walker will find abundant use for Omotope."

By this time we had reached the steamer. Here we found several officers, with a small body of men, all of whom were to act under the orders of Colonel Spicer.

The day was a glorious one, and the view from the steamer magnificent. Right down to the very edge of the western shore came the beautiful orange-groves, and, flashing out from the thick trees, flew hither and thither birds of the gayest and most brilliantly-hued plumage. Before us stretched for miles the blue waters of the mighty lake, unruffled save for the barely perceptible ripple caused by a gentle breeze.

Below the surface shoals of fish darted about, chasing each other in merry sport, or eagerly seeking their prey.

Now and again we saw the huge snout of some monstrous saurian, as it lazily turned to watch our progress, wondering mayhap to which section of the finny tribe our vessel belonged.

We passed several groups of rocky islets, one or two towering to a height of several thousand feet, upheaved from the depths of the lake by some volcanic agency. Very wild and rugged they looked, standing in solitary grandeur as if they were mighty sentinels placed there to safeguard the interests of some powerful water-god.

As we approached our destination, signs of life became visible upon the island. Presently I could distinguish the forms of numerous nearly naked men and women, who were huddled together as if affrighted. They were without exception the most miserable-looking human beings I had ever seen. As I have said, they were almost naked, wearing no clothing save a loin-cloth. They were undoubtedly pure Indians, and their skins were of a dirty-brown colour, very unpleasant to behold.

They were all short in stature, and their frames were weak and puny. Far worse, however, than their physical degradation was the look of hopeless misery in their faces. Hard work, scanty food, and a total lack of anything approaching civilization, had debased them almost to the level of the brute creation. Life to them meant simply a satisfying of the claims of the stomach; to all else they were listless, apathetic, and indifferent.

To ambition and enterprise they were strangers. Of religion they had only the most vague and dim ideas, and

these founded chiefly on the legends and superstitions handed down from their forefathers, who had offered up human sacrifices to their hideous rock-hewn gods in the inmost recesses of their well-nigh impenetrable forests. Their homes were mere mud-hovels, destitute of every vestige of comfort; void of furniture, even of a simple stool. Squatted on the earthen floor, they took their primitive meals, and kindly Mother Earth provided them also with a bed.

Something, however, of their ancient stoicism still remained to them; for ignorant as they were of the reason which had brought us to their isolated home, no sign of fear escaped them. Of the terror they probably felt they gave no sign, but awaited our pleasure in perfect silence.

Colonel Spicer had brought an interpreter, who, singling out one who might have been their chief, told him we would do them no harm, but that, on the contrary, they would gain rather than lose by our presence.

The Indian grunted apathetically, and turning to his companions spoke a few words, which were received with apparent satisfaction.

Once more facing the interpreter, he said, "The white men are our masters; the Indians are but dogs to be beaten or fed, as their masters wish. Once we were a strong and mighty nation. We lived in the land which was our own; we fished in the waters of the lake; we hunted the game through the country; we fought with our enemies, who fled before us, and at their defeat we sang songs of triumph and were glad. Then the white

man came, armed with the thunder and the lightning. He was stronger than we, and we cried to our gods in vain. Some of our brethren, who had wise medicine men, he could not overcome, but left them to dwell in peace among the mountains. We were not so strong. He broke our gods in pieces, and they did not smite him; why, we know not. He destroyed our villages; he killed our wives and little ones; he made us slaves. The land which was ours is his; we can no longer dwell in the home of our fathers. From a great nation he made us a little tribe; for a mighty country he gave us this small island, where at last we live in peace. If the white men wish to kill us, it is easy; if to drive us from our last resting-place, we are ready; the white men are our masters, we are but dogs."

Naturally, I did not understand a word of this speech, and the interpretation considerably astonished me. He had spoken with neither passion nor anger; he had not used a single gesture, but appeared to have been recounting a few bald facts, in which he himself took little interest.

"Come," whispered Pacheco, as the interpreter began afresh, "let us make a little exploration for ourselves; we shall find some things to interest us."

Placing myself under his guidance, I went forward cheerfully, and soon we struck into a narrow pathway which wound its tortuous course up the side of the hills. To our right and left and above our heads towered tall trees—the pine and the stately palm, the ceiba and the mimosa; and everywhere stretched the giant cactus, grow-

ing to an immense height. Here and there the rocks were unclothed, presenting a weird and fantastic appearance. To me, who had never seen the basaltic formations of Scotland and the north of Ireland, it seemed almost impossible to believe that the hand of man had not been busy with hammer and chisel in fashioning these fanciful shapes.

One in particular arrested my attention, and I could readily understand what a hold it would have on the superstitious mind of an uneducated and ignorant savage.

Just below it the path wound suddenly, and turning the corner we saw high above us, cut out in the solid rock, the grotesque outlines of a gigantic and hideous human figure many times magnified. Beheld from any other point of view, the figure became a shapeless mass of rock, but from this one spot it represented a massive idol in a sitting posture.

Pacheco gazed at it with avidity. "I should think," he remarked slowly, "that fantastic conception of Nature has been the mute witness of many a ghastly sacrifice."

I looked at it with renewed interest. "You mean that these Indians have been in the habit of offering human victims to their gods!"

"Yes, it was their common practice; and unless rumour sadly belies them, even now they have not altogether abandoned the horrid custom. But come, I will endeavour to show you some specimens of their taste in idols."

Turning abruptly to the right, we immediately plunged into the thick network of vegetation, so dense that we

had to ply our *machetes* industriously in order to effect any progress.

Had it not been for Pacheco, I should have failed lamentably in my frantic endeavours to force a passage; but he, familiar of old time with the locality, was enabled to direct my steps.

At the end of perhaps an hour's hard struggle, we found ourselves in a partially open glade, which to all appearance had served as a place of worship for a bygone generation. Before me was a strange sight—a sight so eerie, so weird in this gloomy spot, that had I been alone, I doubt whether my nerves would have allowed me to inspect it.

Only a short time since I was on the deck of a modern steamer, a product of this marvellous nineteenth century. Now I stood gazing with awe at this memento of a savage people, dating back from untold ages.

What I saw was this: an enormous block, or rather several blocks, of black basalt, superimposed, one upon the other, in such a way as to form a series of mighty steps. At either end of each step was the rudely-sculptured figure of an uncouth and monstrous animal, a wild creation, wrought, one would think, from the fevered brain of some ancient sculptor. No two figures were alike, and each formed in itself a ludicrous mixture of the most varied and antagonistic animals. Every species in nature had been laid under contribution; unknown birds and beasts, mighty saurians and repulsive serpents,—all were represented and exaggerated.

But the crown, the masterpiece of the work, was re-

served for the summit. There, aloft in silent state, was the misshapen monster before whom countless thousands had prostrated themselves in terror and despair. Hewn out of the black, solid rock was a massive idol, so ugly that I shuddered involuntarily. The features were a caricature of the human face; the head was of enormous size, and out of all proportion to the body; round the neck hung coils of huge serpents; while there were no legs, the lower part of the trunk being joined by what appeared to be intended for the tail of a gigantic alligator.

For a few seconds I closed my eyes: my companion was forgotten; I lived in another age. The glade, just now so solitary and deserted, was alive with people. Standing at the foot of the steps I saw a band of dark-complexioned priests, gazing expectantly, with wild, bright eyes, toward the narrow pathway. Suddenly came a rattling sound as of drums and ear-splitting music, and I heard the tramp of numerous feet. As I listened with strained ears, the air became full of a low, sorrowful wailing.

The priests—all but one venerable old man, the patriarch of the company—formed themselves into a band, and advanced, slowly at first, but soon with a frenzied rapidity, toward the narrow entrance. I followed them with my eyes, watching eagerly for what was to happen. The discordant noises grew louder and louder, the cries more piercing and intense, the tramping nearer and nearer as of a multitude of people.

At last, the first of a long procession, came the doomed

victims. Unbound they marched, two and two; but the fear of death was in their faces—a horrible and revolting death.

I counted them as they emerged into the open—six pairs, youths and maidens, equally matched, in the first glorious blush of life. On they came, with heads downcast; and at their advance the priests opened out, forming a ring to enclose their wretched victims. After them marched an innumerable host of Indians, until the glade was packed with a dense throng of human beings, who ranged themselves in order on the side farthest from the idol, leaving the centre free for the priests and the doomed twelve.

All was now hushed; but the silence did not remain long unbroken. As if at a given signal, the crowd prostrated themselves, touching the earth with their foreheads; while the priests, holding each other's hands, began slowly to gyrate, singing at the same time the words of a solemn chant.

Presently those condemned to the sacrifice, forming an inner circle, took part in the movement, and, as the chant progressed, the motions of the singers became faster and more vehement, but always, I noticed, they drew further from the bowed multitude, and nearer and nearer to the hideous idol. Higher and higher rang the notes of the death-song, until finally it became a furious shout. Then it ceased abruptly, and the unhappy wretches inside the circle fell to the ground.

Lifting them gently, their attendants laid them, with

their faces to the sky, on the lowermost step; and the high priest, stepping forward, addressed the people. What he said I could not tell; but it was like some well-ordered service, for at regular intervals the prostrate worshippers raised their voices in response. This was repeated several times, until I realized the fatal moment had arrived.

Followed by two of the priests, one of whom carried a knife, and the other what looked like an enormous gourd, he turned himself towards the youths and maidens, who lay passively awaiting their fate. Again the service was renewed, this time in a lower key. Thrice he walked from end to end along the doomed row, uttering words maybe of blessing; but as he started for the fourth time, I saw the flash of the fatal knife, and the red blood spurt into the calabash held by the second attendant.

So vivid, so real did it all seem, that I covered my face with my hands and groaned aloud. A light touch on the arm recalled me to a sense of my actual position.

"Dreaming, Colin!" Pacheco exclaimed. "This is an ill place in which to dream dreams; let us retrace our steps," and I consented gladly to the proposition.

We saw various other relics of this ancient superstition during our journey of exploration, but none so perfect, and none, I think, quite so horrible. For the most part, the idols had been cast down and ruthlessly destroyed—a head here, a mutilated limb there, and in many cases the greater part hidden away beneath the dense masses of vegetation. Neither had the pedestals been saved, nor the curiously-carved figures. All alike had fallen before the savage

blows of the soldiers of the cross, who, with all their cruelty and lust of gold, had at least stamped out this debasing and bloodthirsty superstition.

On returning to the shore, we found that our companions had completed their work, and were ready and anxious to get back to the city. Somehow their merriment grated on my ears. The song and jest seemed coarse and vulgar, the loud laugh harsh and discordant. The solemn thoughts conjured up by my visit to the Indian idol accorded but ill with their buffoonery; and I rejoiced when the termination of the voyage enabled me to steal quietly away, and meditate in solitude over the events of the few preceding hours.

For several days after our visit to the island I was kept exceedingly busy in attendance on Colonel Walker, who required my assistance in his correspondence. One afternoon, however, having a few hours at liberty, I sought out Pacheco, who had promised to show me the native manner of catching an iguana.

The iguana, or tree-lizard, resembles in appearance a miniature alligator. It is, speaking generally, from three to four feet in length, and obtains its second name from its habit of living amongst the trees. This it does in order to be near its food, which consists mainly of blossoms. In colour it is of a bluish-grey tint; and though its bite is extremely painful, it is not followed by any other ill effects.

By this time I had become perfectly accustomed to the flesh of the iguana as an article of diet; but, it must be

confessed, I had eaten it at first in complete ignorance of its true nature, or I might not have rendered it such high commendation.

In truth, the flesh is pleasant both to the sight and to the palate. It is beautifully white in appearance, exceedingly tender, and it has a deliciously delicate flavour. Since the days of my sojourn in Central America I have attended many banquets, and feasted upon delicacies prepared by celebrated *chefs*, but I do not know whether I have met with anything that could surpass the exquisite flavour of a nicely-cooked tree-lizard.

All this presupposes you are ignorant of its name before you first make a trial of its properties. The name tree-lizard is not inviting even to a vigorous appetite.

The iguana served at table, however, is very different from the same reptile in its leafy haunts, and it is in the latter state I desire at present to introduce it to my readers.

Our party was a very small one, consisting, in addition to Don Miguel and myself, only of our old friend Brogan and an Indian lad. The last member, probably because he was not an uncle, and had never heard the name of John, had been facetiously christened by Dennis as Uncle John.

Dennis and he were capital mates; but as neither understood a word the other uttered, it was a perpetual source of wonder to me how they contrived to get on together at all. However, they managed it in some way, Dennis speaking English, the Indian replying in broken Spanish; and to judge by their merry laughter, the result must have been of an eminently satisfactory character.

Uncle John was a slight, active, dark-skinned lad, with supple, sinewy limbs, and on account of his cheerful disposition was a great favourite with the filibusters.

He carried with him a long rod, attached to which was a piece of whipcord. In this he had tied a running knot for the purpose of lassoing any of the reptiles we might discover; and as we approached the wood to which Uncle John conducted us, I began to feel quite a keen interest in this novel hunt.

Dennis, as usual, was full of excitement, and from some of his remarks intended to be *sotto voce* I inferred that he had grave doubts regarding my sanity.

After reaching the wood we marched on, now two abreast, now in Indian file, until Uncle John, with a pleased expression on his face, halted in front of a large tree and pointed upwards.

At first I looked in vain; but guided by Pacheco, whose eyesight was keener than mine, I presently discerned one of the creatures of which we had come in search, stretched at full length along a bare limb of the tree.

Its size was above the average—the actual measurement, as we afterwards ascertained, being five feet ten inches from the head to the tip of its tail—and the Indian's eyes glistened with satisfaction at its prospective capture.

The Irishman's face, on the contrary, was indicative of extreme disgust.

"Sure, Mr. Foster," he exclaimed with a ludicrous whine, "it's joking ye are now; ye don't mane to tell me we have come all out here to catch that dirty little snake!"

"I do, though. That 'dirty little snake,' as you call it, will make us a delicious dinner to-morrow, if Uncle John does not let it slip through his fingers."

Dennis held up his hands in horror. "Ate it!" he exclaimed. "I should as soon think of ating me grandmother—may the Lord bless her!—as help meself to a slice of that scaly varmint. Troth!" he added in an undertone, "that comes of being an officer; I always told Phil it was better to be a simple private. This is worse than the Mounseer and his frogs."

During this discussion the reptile lay quite still, being, very likely, fast asleep; but now the Indian, having selected a favourable spot, began to ascend the tree noiselessly and with great rapidity.

Having advanced some little distance, he paused and gave vent to a low, peculiar whistle, not unmelodious in sound.

Dennis touched my arm excitedly. "Hist!" he whispered; "the baste thinks it's his dancing-master; he's looking round for a partner."

At the sound of the whistle the reptile had indeed raised its head, and, stretching out its neck in the most comical manner, appeared to take great interest in the music. With the utmost caution, Uncle John, who evidently enjoyed the sport, raised his rod and proceeded to gently tickle the creature's sides and throat. This operation he continued for some time, much to the scaly one's delight. Higher and higher it raised its head and stretched its neck, until at length the fatal moment arrived. Like

many a wiser animal, it was to pay dearly for its short-lived enjoyment. With a marvellous precision and dexterity, acquired by long practice, Uncle John raised the noose, and slipped it with lightning-like rapidity over the head of his prey. A swift jerk from the elbow tightened the knot and completed the capture, and the next instant Uncle John stood before us, pointing with a grin of triumph to the helpless iguana.

Viewed closely, it certainly did not present a pretty sight, and I could readily understand why Dennis should not esteem it as a great delicacy.

It was, as I have said, nearly six feet in length, with a head too large to be proportionate, and covered with scales. A ridge of pointed scales, too, ran along its back, right to the very tip of the tail. The toes were furnished with extremely sharp claws, which accounted for the marvellous ease with which it could ascend trees. Over the lower part of the head and neck hung a kind of pouch or dewlap, and this was now monstrously swelled out and inflated, either through anger or fear.

By this time the day was very far advanced; so giving orders to Uncle John to kill the reptile and convey its carcass to Don Miguel's residence, we retraced our steps toward the town.

"Well," exclaimed Dennis, reflectively, "I've hunted a good many things at one time and another, from a grizzly bear to a little red dog with a bushy tail, but this bates all. And to ate it, too! Ugh! I must tell Philip."

Don Miguel laughed. "We must find you some eggs,

Dennis. After eating these, you may perhaps be induced to try a slice of the iguana itself."

"Eggs!" ejaculated Dennis; "does the cratur lay eggs?"

"Yes; and very nice they are, I assure you. They are about the size of pigeons' eggs, and are laid in the sand, where the hot sun hatches them."

Dennis shook his head; his prejudices were much too strong to be overcome, and it was plain he regarded the idea of eating a "dirty little snake" with aversion.

I may mention here that in this feeling he was by no means singular. Several of my brother officers, even when pressed by hunger, emphatically declined to appease its pangs by the flesh of the iguana, while a few others who did partake of it were invariably made ill.

This latter circumstance Don Miguel, to whom I narrated it, informed me was by no means uncommon even amongst the natives themselves. From his observations, indeed, it appeared as if there were certain constitutions upon which the reptile's flesh acted with a deleterious effect.

This incident of our iguana hunt, though trivial in itself, is strongly implanted in my memory, as it proved to be the last holiday for many a weary day. The time was fast approaching when, as Don Miguel had predicted, the slumbering volcano should waken from its deceptive lethargy, and once more vomit forth its destructive flood of flame and fire upon the smiling land.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MOUSE HELPS THE LION.

THE morning after we had caught our iguana, I was sauntering carelessly into the town, when Don Miguel came hurrying up with a grave face.

"Anything wrong?" I questioned, for by this time I was pretty well enabled to interpret the signs on my friend's countenance.

He smiled ominously.

"I fear," he answered, "that the storm is about to burst. I came over to ascertain if you had received any information. Luis has just sent me a private dispatch from Leon. He states that by the time his letter reaches me the Costa Ricans will have declared war; a piece of news he has doubtless obtained from Guardiola."

"Nothing is known here at present," I said, "unless indeed to the colonel himself. Here is Henessy, who has just come off duty; let us ask him.—Captain, is there anything fresh stirring?"

"Faith," he laughed, "there ought to be with all the commotion of last night. The colonel has been giving audience to a succession of mounted messengers for hours, and now I believe he has just called a council."

Before either of us could make any reply, Trevethik approached, and after saluting, addressed himself to Pacheco.

"Major," he said hastily, "the commander-in-chief requires your presence in the council-chamber at once. Can you tell me, sir, where I shall find Colonel Spicer?"

"Yes. I left him in the mess-room at breakfast."

Saluting again, Trevethik hastened away, having manifestly received orders to waste no time. Don Miguel had already departed, and I was left alone with Henessy.

"Depend upon it, Foster, there's mischief brewing," exclaimed he. "I think I'll snatch an hour's sleep. Walker is not the man to hold a council for nothing."

Eager to learn what was going on, I accompanied him to the barracks, where we found orders had been received prohibiting any man, officer or private, from passing outside the gates.

Colonel Spicer was coming quickly from his room. "Ah, Henessy," he cried cheerfully, "just off duty! Go and have a nap; you may need it.—Foster, you appear fresh; take a dozen men with you, and beat up the town for stragglers. If you meet with any officers, tell them they are to return to quarters at once, by the express command of the general."

"Yes, sir," I answered; and rapidly selecting a few trusty men, I was soon back again in the town.

By some mysterious means, rumours of the coming trouble were already extensively circulated, and the people as usual had gathered in little knots, eagerly discussing the situation. The faces of many betrayed signs of fear

and apprehension, but the majority wore a pleased expression, as if the hour of their deliverance were at hand.

Having completed the round of the city, and sent in all the stragglers we could find, I hurried my men back to the barracks, where we found a further development of affairs.

"The officers of La Falange will assemble their men in parade order on the Grand Plaza at two o'clock. By order of the general commanding. (Signed) C. SPICER, Adjutant."

"What does it mean?" asked Jevons, one of a group of officers amongst whom I stood; and Harvey, a veteran of many years' standing, answered significantly,—

"War, my boy. You may depend upon it, some of the neighbouring Dons intend to try if they cannot turn us out. But we shall soon learn the truth. It is already time to begin mustering the men."

Once again we stood drawn up on the plaza—a solid mass twelve hundred strong, awaiting with breathless excitement the coming of our leader.

At length he appeared at the head of about a dozen officers, mounted upon a splendid white horse, which he sat with the graceful ease of an accomplished rider. As usual he was plainly attired, the familiar, closely-buttoned black coat being unrelieved by a single decoration. That something serious had happened we who knew him best were instantly aware from the sternly-compressed lips and the dangerous glitter in his eyes.

A round of cheers greeted him, but he raised his hand for silence.

"Boys," he began, in his short, terse way, "I have some-

thing to say to you. You know we came here on the invitation of the Nicaraguan government to restore order in this unhappy country. We have done our work honestly. We have put down anarchy. To-day every man's life and property are as safe in Nicaragua as in New York. We have borne the heat and burden of the day. We have fought—many of us have bled, some have laid down their lives—and we have claimed no reward, save that solemnly promised us. Yesterday, Nicaragua was at peace with the world, her citizens intent only on the interests of their country. In the midst of this harmony has been sounded a note of discord. The Costa Ricans, jealous of the prosperity of our adopted country, have thrown down the gauntlet of battle. It is not my fault; the fault is not yours. On their heads rests the responsibility. We have not injured them; we have been true to our vow; we have fought in the interests of peace alone. My friends, we have sent them the olive-branch, they have sent us back the knife. Be it so. We shall give them war to the knife, and the knife to the hilt."

What further he would have said I do not know; his speech was drowned in a universal roar of applause. We felt that he had spoken nothing but the truth. We had done our work honourably and bravely. No man or woman had been injured. We had fought and bled, and even gone without our stipulated pay uncomplainingly. We were at peace; and the blame for all that followed must be placed to the account of those who thus wantonly stirred up the evils of war.

While this feeling actuated the majority of our men, there were some few who cheered out of sheer sympathy for the coming combat. In our ranks we counted, as must always necessarily be the case, some wild, turbulent spirits, who had long since wearied of inaction, and who looked forward with a fierce joy to the renewal of hostilities.

Nothing now was talked of but the approaching campaign, which every one, with a few trifling exceptions, confidently predicted would last but a short time.

One of those who took a gloomier view of the situation was Don Miguel, whose opinion was greatly influenced by the reports forwarded by his brother.

"Do not allow yourself to be deceived," Don Luis wrote; "your difficulties are only now beginning. The Costa Ricans are massing a large army, and are determined to sweep the filibusters from the country. Guardiola is actively engaged in beating up recruits in Honduras; the soldiers of San Salvador, eager to take advantage of your first defeat, are lining the frontier; and besides all this, some of your own men are not to be trusted."

Of the truth of this last assertion I was soon to receive a striking illustration, and it happened in this wise.

One afternoon as I sat writing in the colonel's room, he looked up suddenly from his desk and said, "Colin, would you like a ride?"

"Yes, sir," I answered, "very much."

"Then dine with me this evening, and after dinner you shall have one. Oh, by the way, see that your pistols are in proper order. It is just possible you may require them,

though I do not think you will. Of course it will be unnecessary to mention our projected scheme to your brother officers."

This display of caution, though in entire accordance with the colonel's character, naturally whetted my curiosity, and it was with no little interest that, having seen to my weapons, I returned to his room.

The dinner, which was a very simple affair, did not last long, for the colonel was no epicure. Very shortly we were in the courtyard, where two horses, properly saddled and bridled, were held in waiting.

Without a word my companion mounted one, and following his example I rode after him into the streets of the city. For some time we proceeded in silence, only pausing occasionally to give the countersign to the sentries, who, recognizing their leader, saluted respectfully and allowed us to pass.

Once outside the town, the colonel turned in his seat and said pleasantly, "Now, Colin, we shall see if you have learned to ride. We are going to Rivas. I wish to ascertain for myself if everything is safe in that quarter."

It was a wild journey that ride to Rivas, and one that will long linger in my memory. The night was dark, the road little better than a cart-rut, in which our animals had ample opportunity of falling and breaking their legs; but for all that we pushed forward at our utmost speed.

Twice we stopped—once in the early morning, and again later, at a wayside hut—for the purpose of resting our weary steeds; but after the second halt we rode on

without further pause to Rivas, which we entered as night began to fall. For my part, I was too tired to do anything but lie down; but the colonel seemed almost as fresh as when we started.

Lieutenant-General Butler, who commanded at Rivas, met us at the entrance to the barracks, and greeted the colonel warmly.

"You have had a hard ride, judging from the appearance of your beasts," he observed. "All well, I trust, at Granada?"

"Yes, all is well so far. Nothing changed here, I presume, since your last dispatch?"

"No; everything is very quiet, and the men in good condition."

"Well, give Lieutenant Foster some supper and a shakedown. You and I will make a little tour of inspection; I desire to make myself thoroughly acquainted with the position. Hand the horses over to the care of a trusty man; we start again at dawn."

Butler was too well acquainted with his leader's iron will and equally iron constitution to make any demur; so he accepted the situation, and hastened to comply with the requests.

"Better not send you into the mess-room, Foster," he said laughingly; "the men will worry you to death with questions. I will find you supper and a bed in my quarters.—Here, Merry," to a soldier-servant standing a little distance off, "I give Mr. Foster into your care; find him something to eat and a bed.—Johnson, take these

horses and groom them carefully; they have done a hard day's work."

Merry, who proved to be the lieutenant-general's cook, housekeeper, and general factotum, soon provided me with an appetizing supper; and then I was glad to follow him into another room, and lie down on one of the primitive bedsteads it contained.

The couch was not exactly a luxurious one, consisting merely of a wide plank slightly tilted, and attached to four upright posts, while a block of wood did duty as a bolster. However, I was not in the mood to criticize my sleeping accommodation too harshly, and before Merry left the room I was fast asleep; though previously to lying down I had taken the precaution of placing my revolver ready to my hand.

It must have been about half-an-hour after midnight when the sound of voices roused me. Colonel Walker and Butler were standing in the doorway.

"Not at all," the former was saying; "this will do excellently. Observe how soundly the youngster sleeps. Have us called at four sharp, breakfast at a quarter past. I've explained everything now, I think. Good-night;" and closing the door, Butler moved softly away.

I cannot pretend to explain why it should have been so, but after the colonel's entrance I could not sleep. My eyes a few minutes before had been so heavy with slumber that they would scarcely open; now, although my limbs still ached from the effects of the long ride, my senses were fully awake.

For some time I lay listening intently to the regular breathing of my companion, and the tramp, tramp of the sentinel as he paced steadily to and fro in the courtyard. All else was still.

As it happened, the colonel's bed was so situated that, while I lay in complete darkness, he was in the direct line of dim light which struggled through a little window on the opposite side of the room. Hitherto I had not noticed this; now I lay staring at it in a fit of strange nervousness. Presently a peculiar sound fell on my ears—a faint click like the cautious unfastening of a door—then all again was still. I was ashamed of my nervousness, yet could not subdue it. I was in an agony of fear, yet did not know what frightened me. Instinctively my right hand closed over the handle of my revolver, and I lay listening with strained ears for a repetition of the sound. It did not come, only the regular breathing of the sleeping colonel and the monotonous tramp of the sentry beneath could be heard.

I smiled to myself in the darkness, smiled at the thought of my childish weakness, and was in the very act of re-closing my eyes, when it struck me forcibly that on the ground at the foot of Walker's bedstead was a dark patch hitherto unseen.

I began to consider. Had I observed it before? Certainly I could not remember it. It could not be caused by the sudden failure of the dim light from outside. In that case the whole of the space would have been darkened. But it was not so; and, moreover, this particular patch appeared to possess substance.

Very carefully I watched, and presently my vigilance was rewarded by a further discovery. The mysterious patch moved—very, very slowly; but still it moved. My former fright was now swallowed up in curiosity. What was it? what was it doing?

So little thought had I given to our personal safety, that the simple explanation of this phenomenon did not occur to me. In the commandant's house, surrounded by our friends, with sentries posted at every place of entrance and exit, how could I suspect what was actually taking place? Still it was extremely curious, and I continued to watch closely. Presently, little by little, the dark body disappeared from my sight. It had turned at right angles, and was now, I knew, by the side of Walker's bed.

Firmly grasping my revolver, I raised my head cautiously and peered into the darkness. I could perceive nothing. Had the strange object crawled under the bed? Just as I was considering if I should not jump out and probe the mystery at once, my eyes caught sight of that which instantly revealed the terrible truth. Between me and my chief there rose noiselessly a shadowy form, whose originally shapeless outlines gradually developed into the figure of a man, and in the right hand was a naked knife!

To alarm the sleeper was impossible. I durst not cry out; it was too late. One plunge of that glittering blade, and all would be over. My heart beat so loudly that I feared lest its noise should alarm our dangerous visitor; but luckily he was too engrossed to notice it. I could not distinguish his movements clearly, but I knew he was

carefully planning how best to deliver the fatal blow. All this time I had been breathing calmly at regular intervals, simulating as best I could the action of a natural slumber; but my right hand held my revolver, and my eyes were fixed steadily before me.

I had formed my plan, and now waited with a terrible anxiety for the moment to arrive in which to put it into execution. At last it came. The wretch had made his calculations. The blade was raised in the air. I could perceive the shadowy outline of his arm. Should I fail? If so, then indeed should I never forget that wild ride to Rivas!

Forcing myself to be calm, I raised my revolver silently, took what aim I could, and fired. A shriek of pain, followed by a savage oath in Spanish, proclaimed my success. Then came the rush of a flying figure toward the door, and at the same instant the colonel and I sprang forward in pursuit.

The would-be assassin had not the remotest chance of escape. He could make no resistance—my shot had broken his arm—and as we reached him he sank to the ground with a piteous appeal for mercy. Now, too, help arrived from outside. The report of the revolver had aroused the soldiers, and several officers, headed by the lieutenant-general, came running in.

Thus far Walker had not spoken. Now he said calmly. "There is no cause for alarm, gentlemen. I beg that you will at once retire to your quarters.—Butler, put this fellow in close confinement, and send the regimental

surgeon to him. His arm is broken, I think, at the wrist. Good-night; I will attend to your prisoner in the morning."

When we were once more alone, he took my hand and pressed it gratefully. "Thank you, Colin," he said simply; "I see you have not forgotten how to shoot. It was a good shot, and I shall not forget it."

"The mouse and the lion, sir," I answered, and I felt my face glow with pleasure at his praise.

"Ha!" he exclaimed with a genial laugh, "I remember. Well, the mouse has helped the lion to some purpose this time. And now to bed again; we have still nearly two hours before us. We must not allow this little incident to rob us of our sleep."

We placed ourselves on our respective planks, and in a few minutes this remarkable man was sleeping as soundly as if no danger had ever threatened him, while I lay powerless even to close my eyes.

It was with unfeigned satisfaction I responded to the summons to rise; and having performed my toilet, which consisted chiefly in having a good wash, I followed Walker into the room where breakfast had been laid. As usual he ate sparingly; but remembering the journey before us, I was less abstemious, and was still engaged in a spirited attack on the provisions, when a sergeant with a file of men led the prisoner into the room.

Glancing up hastily I recognized the scowling features of my surly friend Josef, who had been so eager to hasten my journey into the other world. At the same moment he

caught sight of me, and the scowl on his face grew more forbidding still.

"Do you know him?" asked the colonel, noticing the expression of recognition.

"Yes; he formed one of Guardiola's command when I had the honour of a personal interview with that general."

"Then this man was a soldier in the Servile army?"

"At that time he was, certainly."

"He was one of those who came over when Corral submitted," explained Butler; "since then he has done service with me."

"Ah! just so.—Well, my friend, what have you to say for yourself?"

Josef vouchsafed no answer, but continued to glower sullenly at all of us.

The colonel took out his watch, and opening it with a brisk movement, laid it on the table. "Now, my friend," he said sharply, "listen to me. At the end of five minutes I start for Granada. If by that time you have not made a clean breast of this business, you will be hanged there and then."

There could be no mistaking the speaker's intentions —each word was stamped with the impress of truth—and Josef's swarthy skin turned a shade paler.

"There is nothing to tell more than you already know," he said sullenly. "I hated you, and tried to kill you—that is all."

"But why hate me? What was your reason?"

"Because you murdered Ponciano Corral, and he had always stood my friend."

"You are a bold knave, but a trifle unreasonable," exclaimed Walker good-humouredly. "General Corral's life was forfeited, not to me, but to the laws of his country. However, we will not discuss that. I believe you are speaking the truth, and will accept your statement." Turning to the lieutenant-general, he added, "Keep him until his arm is well, then send him to his friends.—But remember, my man, if you fall into our hands again, nothing will save you from the tree."

At a sign from Butler, Josef was reconducted to his cell, and immediately afterwards we began to prepare for our own departure.

Nothing worthy of record happened on the homeward journey; it was but a repetition of the ride to Rivas, except that I felt not a little proud and gratified at having saved the colonel's life.

In Granada we found everything had gone on as usual. Even the fact of Walker's absence was known to very few, as he was not a man accustomed to take many people into his confidence.

"Good-night, Colin," he said, as we parted at his door; "I shall never forget that you have twice saved my life."

Don Miguel was seeking me in the mess-room, and after supper, while he sat and smoked innumerable deftly-made cigarettes, I told him what had happened.

"Ah," he remarked reflectively as I concluded, "your colonel is a brave man, but he does not understand my

countrymen. He has committed a grievous blunder in allowing that wretched assassin his life. But you have had a tiresome journey, and are wearied. I am selfish in thus keeping you from your couch. Adieu, my friend, until to-morrow."

I was in truth feeling greatly fatigued, so I did not attempt to detain him longer; and shortly after his departure I went to bed.

CHAPTER XIV.

A TERRIBLE DISASTER.

DURING this time events were rapidly thickening. The Costa Ricans having thrown down the gauntlet were preparing for a determined and deadly struggle. Their agents were busily engaged secretly fomenting disturbances in Nicaragua, and endeavouring to drag the neighbouring states into the quarrel. Each succeeding day brought us news of some further development, and at last we learned that the Costa Ricans had actually invaded the country.

Walker resolved to strike the first blow, and the better to arouse the enthusiasm of his followers, he organized a brigade of two hundred men. These he divided into five companies, two of which were composed of Americans, and the remainder of men of other nationalities.

It was a brilliant sight as they marched proudly from the city, their banners swelling gloriously to the breeze. The streets were densely packed with people, who poured forth volley after volley of enthusiastic cheering as the brigade swept by.

At their head rode Colonel Louis Schlessinger, to whom

the command had been entrusted, with Walker, who gazed with pride on the stalwart company, by his side.

At the outskirts of the city a halt was called, and the general addressed a few words to the filibusters.

"Soldiers!" he exclaimed, "to you a glorious task has been confided. The country which you have sworn to defend has been invaded by an unscrupulous foe. We have done them no injury; we were at peace with them and the world. They have drawn this contest on their own heads. They desire to ravage this unhappy land with fire and sword. We look to you to sweep them from its borders. Go forward fearlessly, and when your task is accomplished we will welcome you as heroes."

The air was rent by a mighty shout; the dense volume of cheering ran along the line until it culminated in one universal roar.

My heart beat fast as the men recommenced their march, and I longed ardently to take my place in the ranks.

The brave Pacheco was there, his countenance grave and thoughtful; and scarcely had I exchanged a brief farewell with him, than the merry laughing eyes of the Irishman peered into mine.

"Ah, sure now, liftinant," he cried saucily, "don't ye just envy us?—this is better than snake-huntin'. Here's Trevethik with a fit of the blues because they've kept ye out of the fun."

"Good-bye, sir," said Trevethik. "No doubt the colonel will find you as useful here as there."

"Good-bye, Phil," I responded. "I should like to be with you, but I wish you both good-luck."

Lost in reverie I stood watching them till they disappeared from view, and then, with troubled feelings, I rode slowly back in the direction of the city.

On the second afternoon following the departure of the brigade, I was unexpectedly sent for by the colonel. To my astonishment I found him lying on a couch, and he greeted me with a faint smile.

"Close the door, Colin," he said feebly, "and come here. I am ill, so ill that I can scarcely rise. I think it must be an attack of fever. Do not look so alarmed, my boy; it may be nothing serious. Take these keys. In my desk you will find a small square bottle, which contains a powerful drug. Pour half a teaspoonful into a glass of water, and bring it to me."

Like one in a dream I did as I was bidden; and after drinking the mixture he lay back with a deep sigh of satisfaction.

"Now I shall sleep for three hours," he said. "Until then remember I am too busy to see any one. No one need know of this attack of indisposition, unless I become worse. Do you understand?"

I nodded affirmatively, and, having made him comfortable, withdrew, plunged in melancholy, into the outer room.

Inexperienced as I was, I could not but be aware of the disastrous consequences which must inevitably ensue should our leader's illness prove fatal. Without the col-

onel's commanding influence, the whole fabric which he had reared with such care and pains would crumble to pieces at the first rude shock.

There were other men equally brave, and, from a military standpoint, a few, perhaps, as clever, but there was no one who could satisfactorily fill his place as the leader of the Falange. Our men were brave, reckless, and daring; but many of them were also fierce and turbulent, only to be withheld from violence by the iron authority which the colonel wielded. His were the far-seeing eye, the busy brain, the clear and steadfast mind, the stern, resolute will. Deprived of his leadership, the Falange would degenerate into a disorderly rabble, and the country would be plunged anew into anarchy. I shuddered at the dismal outlook.

At the end of the third hour I crept softly into the room. He was still sleeping, but I noticed that his breathing was irregular, and his face unwholesomely flushed. Nothing of importance had occurred, and I resolved not to disturb him.

The afternoon was deepening into evening when he wakened, and, in a tone scarcely louder than a whisper, called my name. Greatly to his disappointment, the rest had apparently produced no good effect; he was even weaker than before.

"I will go to bed, Colin," he announced faintly. "Send Skene to me, and do you write notes of apology to Burton and Spicer. They were to have dined with me this evening; put them off on the plea of business. After Skene

has finished here, he will see to your dinner, and then you may come to my room."

I called Hiram Skene, the colonel's personal attendant, and while he assisted his master to the sleeping-room, I dispatched the notes as requested to the two officers.

Presently Hiram returned, and his face expressed a sense of anxiety. "The colonel is very ill, Mr. Foster," he said uneasily; "don't you think we ought to send for Dr. Sparrow?"

The position was an awkward one, and I did not know what answer to make. As usual, in such cases, I concluded to wait a little longer and see how matters progressed. "I shall remain with him all night," I said. "If, later on, he becomes worse, I will myself fetch the doctor."

When I entered the room he was wide awake but breathing heavily, and his eyes shone with a wild light. I gave him another dose of the medicine, which somewhat eased his breathing, and, after a while, he fell asleep.

Toward ten o'clock he opened his eyes, and I saw with dismay he did not recognize me. His face was flushed, and he tossed restlessly from side to side. I stooped over to smooth the rumpled pillows, and placed my hand on his hot brow. He pointed to his throat, motioning feebly for water, which I gave him, and he lay for a while more tranquil.

The calm, however, was not of long duration; his restlessness increased with every passing moment; he began to talk wildly and at random, and once he struggled violently to get out of bed. So great was the strength with which

the fever temporarily endowed him, that I was compelled to summon Hiram to my assistance, and our united efforts were barely sufficient to withstand his desperate struggles.

I was now thoroughly alarmed, so, after inducing him to swallow another dose of medicine, I gave Hiram strict injunctions not to leave him for a single instant, and started to find the doctor.

Dr. Sparrow was in bed, but he rose directly I told my story, and hurried to the colonel's room. "What have you given him?" he inquired, and I pointed to the bottle.

He removed the stopper and tasted the liquid. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "the chief would have made as clever a doctor as soldier. We cannot do anything more. Do not be alarmed, he will pull through. He has an iron constitution, and his temperate habits are all in his favour. You see he has not weakened his system by free living, or his chances would not be worth *that*," and the worthy doctor snapped his fingers.

This was certainly encouraging, and I returned to my task of watching the sick man with a feeling of relief.

Another evening had come round before he recovered consciousness, and his first words were concerning the troops he had sent against the Costa Ricans.

"Have you received any message from Schlessinger?" he asked, and I shook my head in the negative.

Presently came another question—"Have I been very ill?"

"Yes; so ill that you frightened me and I fetched Dr. Sparrow."

"And you have nursed me all the time! I wonder, Colin, if ever I shall get out of your debt?"

I was going to answer, but he anticipated me. "Let Skene come in," he said; "you must be wearied, and it would be bad policy to overwork my best nurse. Take a horse from my stable and have a long gallop; the exercise will put new life into you."

I was really longing for a breath of fresh air, and, as he was manifestly better, I made no difficulty about following his suggestion.

Hiram readily undertook to keep watch in the sick-room, and selecting a good steed I rode out into the silent streets. Unconsciously I turned the horse's head in the direction taken by Colonel Schlessinger's troops, and had proceeded some distance beyond the city when I heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs.

The rider was coming towards me, and thinking it possible that I might acquire some news of my companions, I drew rein and waited.

Presently a horseman humming a merry tune, and evidently upon good terms with himself, approached.

"Halt!" I cried sharply; "who goes there?"

"A friend!"

"Advance, friend, and give the countersign."

"'Granada and Rivas.' If I mistake not, I am addressing Lieutenant Foster!"

"Yes; I am Lieutenant Foster, but who are you? I do not recognize you."

"Yet we have met before," he exclaimed; and as he

drew up his horse by my side, I saw he was the man who had been pointed out to me as Don Garcia.

He noticed my look of recognition and smiled softly. "Ah!" he said, "you remember me. Our last meeting took place at the execution of Ponciano Corral. Ponciano's friends have long memories, señor, of which they have given good proof this very day."

His manner was so odd, and his eyes sparkled with such a malicious gleam of triumph, that I felt certain he was the bearer of adverse news; but I volunteered no remark.

"You do not betray much curiosity, señor," he observed blandly; "perhaps you have already heard the tidings!"

"Your speech is a riddle; pray explain yourself."

"Then you are in ignorance of what has occurred at Santa Rosas? Well, my friend, this day has witnessed the beginning of the end. Your troops have been cut to pieces like a flock of sheep by the Costa Ricans. I cannot tell you more, but the scattered survivors will doubtless bring their story with them."

I could not disbelieve his statement, he spoke with too evident an air of truth and sincerity.

"Do you propose riding to meet them?" he inquired with an affected simplicity for which I could willingly have knocked him from his horse.

However, I controlled my temper, and with a curt reply in the negative turned back abruptly in the direction of the town. If our men had indeed been repulsed at Santa Rosas—and I durst not hope that Garcia had been deceived

—the situation would rapidly become one of extreme peril. Flushed with success, the Costa Ricans would redouble their efforts; and our defeat would encourage the governments of the neighbouring states to throw their weight into the scale against us.

My thoughts flew to my personal friends, and I was filled with gloomy forebodings. What of Don Miguel, and the light-hearted Irishman, and Trevethik, whom I loved with an almost filial affection? Were they safe? My heart misgave me. For once I was tempted to regret their daring recklessness and stubborn bravery, as I reflected that these very qualities had probably prevented their escape from the hard-fought field.

And the colonel too? We could not conceal the disastrous news from him; sooner or later he must hear it, and I dreaded the effect it might have upon him in his weakened state.

He was sleeping nicely when I returned, so, leaving the faithful Hiram to keep watch, I went into the outer room, and covering myself with a rug, fell into a doze.

About four o'clock in the morning I was aroused by a noise outside, and opening the door quietly, observed a knot of officers engaged in an animated discussion.

Dr. Sparrow's voice was raised above the rest, and his words came to me distinctly. "You had better let me go first," he was saying, "and ascertain if he is in a fit condition to be informed."

"Yes," assented another, whom I recognized as Major-General Stevenson, "that is the better course." Then

perceiving me, he added, "Ah! there is Foster, who will announce you. Go in, doctor; we will wait here."

"Has the news arrived?" I asked in a whisper, as he entered.

He stared at me with a perplexed look. "Does he know?" he inquired anxiously, pointing towards Walker's room.

"No; but I heard a rumour last night that we had been badly beaten at Santa Rosas. Is it true?"

"Yes; it was a disgraceful business. Schlessinger bungled it dreadfully, as far as I can gather, and the men ran like sheep."

"What! all of them?"

"No. The American contingent fought well, and left two-thirds of their number on the field. But I must see Walker; all depends upon him now. If he is too ill to take the command, everything will be hopelessly ruined."

"Listen! he is conversing with Skene, and appears to be speaking quite rationally."

I ushered the doctor into the sick-room, and returned to my post with a sorrowful heart. Two-thirds had fallen; how many of my friends were amongst them? I tried to banish my gloomy fear, but it stuck to me resolutely and refused to be ousted.

Presently Hiram Skene came out to fetch Major-General Stevenson, and guessing from this that my services would not be required for a time, I determined to join the officers, and ascertain if possible the fate of my missing friends.

They were still talking eagerly; but though I listened

with the utmost attention, I could hear no mention of Don Miguel or of the two filibusters, in whose fate I was so deeply interested. That we had suffered a serious if not fatal reverse was certain, as several of the runaways had come in; but their accounts of the affair were extremely meagre and perplexing.

This uncertainty was terrible. I could no longer endure the suspense, and going to the stable I saddled one of the colonel's horses, with the intention of riding towards Rivas, from which direction the fugitives must necessarily come.

"Ill news travels apace," and on this occasion the old adage was amply verified.

The inhabitants had turned out *en masse* into the streets, and were discussing the situation in high-pitched voices and with wild gesticulations. It was easy to perceive that our loss of prestige had already begun to produce its inevitable effects. "American dogs," "Dogs of filibusteros," mingled with other opprobrious epithets, could be heard on all sides, and here and there the name of Ponciano Corral reached my ears, as I steadily forced my way through the surging crowd.

For a moment indeed I was in extreme danger. I had just turned out of the plaza, when some one shouted, "There goes the real slayer of our beloved Corral—the boy officer on horseback!"

The speaker kept himself concealed, but I recognized Don Garcia's tones, and realized the awkwardness of the situation. An angry murmur, which increased every mo-

ment in volume and intensity, rose from the crowd, and presently a stone whizzed past my head.

Knowing that a moment's hesitation would probably seal my doom, I promptly wheeled my horse, and drawing a revolver from my belt, faced the angry mob. "Men of Granada," I cried loudly, "are you mad? Pause a moment and reflect. You can kill me easily enough, if that be your wish; but do you think I shall die unavenged? I tell you if such a foul wrong were done to the meanest member of La Falange, our general would give your beautiful city over to the fire and the sword. Make way there, and heed not the lying promises of a traitor like Don Garcia."

I stuck the spurs sharply into the horse's sides, and the crowd, momentarily awed by the threat of Walker's vengeance, fell back sullenly. When I had got clear of the town I rode forward swiftly, thinking to meet some of the stragglers returning to Granada.

Nor were my expectations disappointed. About two miles from the city I encountered the vanguard of the defeated force. They came along in twos and threes, and for a brief space I felt disposed to pity them, so keenly did they appear to feel their disgrace.

Hot, dusty, and footsore, they slouched along with hanging heads and shamefaced looks. Some, in order to expedite their flight, had cast away their rifles, and in many cases their knapsacks also. A few bore evidences of the fight, but the majority looked as if they had not fired a shot.

I scanned them closely, although knowing it was morally impossible that either of my friends should be found in such craven company. I was right—the motley band did not contain a single American amongst them. They consisted for the most part of Frenchmen, Germans, and Nicaraguans, and but little information could be extracted from them.

"The Americanos?" said one Nicaraguan whom I addressed. "He did not know. They were behind, those who were not killed; but they were not many. In his opinion they were all lunatics, standing still to be slaughtered, when by running away they could have saved their lives."

I remembered some lines which my father had once quoted, beginning—

> "He that fights, and runs away,
> May live to fight another day,"

and wondered if this free and easy soldier were acquainted with some parallel version in his own tongue.

"But Major Pacheco?" I asked eagerly. "Surely you can tell me something about your own officer?"

However, even in this instance I was over-sanguine. "He had seen the major certainly. Oh yes, Major Pacheco had led them against the Costa Ricans, but what had happened afterwards he could not say." Some of the soldiers thought he had been killed; one had observed him fighting side by side with a gigantic filibuster, and surrounded by enemies. "So he may have been killed," concluded this warlike Central American, "or he may have got away in safety. *Quien sabe?*"

The rascal's poltroonery so enraged me that I rode on hastily, fearful lest, if I lingered, I should strike him.

Not for a considerable time was my patience rewarded. At length a steady tramp, tramp in the distance, mingled with the jolting and creaking of some primitive vehicles, warned me that in a few minutes I should be face to face with the remnant of the American band.

For a brief space I dashed forward furiously, then with an abrupt jerk I pulled my horse to a standstill. Now that my doubts and apprehensions were so speedily to be settled, I turned faint at heart, and dared not advance.

To what was I hastening? The Nicaraguan's casual remark about Don Miguel and the huge filibuster in the midst of the foe filled my mind with dread concerning all three. I knew that wherever Trevethik was to be found, there too would the Irishman be.

I had not long to wait. A bend in the road concealed them at present from my view, but very shortly the head of the little procession turned the corner.

Truly it was a pitiable spectacle, and yet my heart thrilled within me as I reflected that this sorry band was in very truth a handful of heroes. These alone, with their dead and wounded comrades, had withstood the shock of battle; had fought valiantly and well in a hopeless contest; had watched with scorn the flight of their cowardly allies; and had held their own till nearly two-thirds of their number lay dead upon the stricken field.

I doffed my hat, and sat bareheaded as they approached. A dozen men three-deep, first; two rough, misshapen carts,

filled with the dead and wounded; followed by another dozen men in similar formation to the van—this was the sight which presented itself to my first glance.

From the clumsy vehicles came cries and groans of anguish, and of those on foot many could not repress an occasional exclamation of pain.

But as I looked my heart gave a great bound, for close behind the second cart were two men, bandaged and bloody, and carrying between them an improvised stretcher. Jumping lightly from my horse, I hastened across. The men were Dennis and Trevethik, and their burden was—

An inward monitor told me it was the major. "Is he alive?" I whispered; and Trevethik, whose face lighted up at sight of me, answered in a low tone, "Yes, he is alive; but insensible, and dangerously wounded."

Giving my horse to a soldier who had been shot in the leg, I sorrowfully took my place by the side of my injured friend. In vain I begged that I might be allowed to relieve either of his faithful attendants; neither would consent.

"No, Mr. Foster," said Trevethik quietly; "let us have our way. It is an honour to carry the major. There is not a braver man in the army than your friend. Had his rascally niggers possessed but a fraction of his pluck, we should not be returning whipped."

"I've seen some pretty tall fighting in my time," remarked a gaunt Kentuckian close behind, who carried his left arm in a sling, and stepped gingerly on one foot, "but I allow I never saw anything to equal the major's per-

formance at Santa Rosas. I misbedoubt if Trevethik himself did more execution; it was sheer wild-cat fighting."

"Where is he wounded?" I inquired.

"Faith then, liftinant," grinned Dennis, "ye'd better be after asking where he isn't wounded, for I think 'twould be easier answered."

Nothing perhaps could have atoned to these brave men for the bitterness of defeat, but the nature of their reception in Granada must have gone far towards mitigating their grief.

The news of their coming had preceded them, and their fellow-countrymen flocked out in hundreds to bid them welcome. Cheer upon cheer ascended to the heavens as the battered heroes came in sight; and so contagious was the enthusiasm that the wounded and the dying forgot their hurts for a space, and responded with a feeble "Hurrah!"

Those who were unhurt, or whose injuries did not require the attention of the surgeons, were immediately borne off by their companions to be feasted, and congratulated upon their escape from the terrible fray.

I will not attempt to describe the scene at the hospital as the carts were emptied of their gruesome loads; it was too sickening.

Thanks to Trevethik and Dennis, who availed themselves of a short cut, the major's arrival preceded that of the others, so that Dr. Sparrow was able to give him his undivided care.

The Irishman's whimsical statement was not far from the truth. My poor friend had received numerous wounds,

and he lay so still and motionless that I thought he must surely be dead.

The doctor undeceived me. "No," he said, "he still lives, but that is all."

"Can he recover?" I queried anxiously, after he had made a hurried examination.

"He can, though I scarcely think he will; he has lost so much blood. But excuse me, lieutenant, we shall be extremely busy in a few minutes, and this is hardly the place for you."

"Can I not nurse him? He is very dear to me, doctor."

"You will do no good, and you may be wanted at any moment. Besides, he will know no one for days. You can come and see him when you like, and at the first sign of returning consciousness I will send for you."

With this assurance I had to remain content, and going to my room I wrote an account of my friend's pitiful condition to his brother Luis, and dispatched it by a special messenger to Leon. This done, I sent for Trevethik, in order to learn what had really taken place at Santa Rosas.

CHAPTER XV.

A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

"NOW, Phil, light your pipe—I know you are longing to smoke—and tell me all about it."

I like to think of that dirty black pipe which Phil carried in safety through so many ugly places; he always treated it with such an air of tender reverence.

After gravely blowing a few clouds he removed the pipe from his mouth, and began thoughtfully,—

"Upon my word, Mr. Foster, I really don't know what there is to tell you. From start to finish it was a disgraceful affair, and a number of brave men, whom we could ill afford to lose, have fallen. For once in his life I reckon the chief made a grave blunder. His plan of cutting us up into sections worked out badly; and, although it's not a nice thing to say, the officer in command was totally unfitted for his position. Do you remember our brush with the Serviles at Rivas? Well, this was very similar, only the fighting was fiercer. The enemy, I should say, were about five or six hundred strong, and well led. They attacked us before we could get into position, and almost at the first rush our fellows broke and fled.

Only the Americans and a mere handful of the others remained.

"The Costers [the filibusters were far from punctilious in matters of nomenclature] came on with a wild yell, and for a moment it looked as if they would sweep us clean away. But our men were game, and did not give way an inch. Not a shot was fired until the niggers were close upon us, and then every rifle covered a man. The Costers were brave enough, but they could not stand that, and fell back in disorder, leaving their front rank stretched at our feet. Still they came on again and again; and though we beat them off each time, it was at a terrible loss to ourselves. The havoc was simply frightful. Men dropped, dead and dying, on all sides; but we closed up silently, determined to sell our lives as dearly as possible. We knew the end could not be far off. Sooner or later they were bound to wear us down by sheer force of numbers. At length they made their final effort; but not a man flinched, though I think no one of us expected to escape alive. This time our rifles could not stop them—we were too few in numbers—and, shouting their war-cry, they were upon us.

"Perhaps, Mr. Foster, you have never witnessed a pack of famished wolves spring upon their prey. This last charge of the Costers reminded me of just such a scene. In one instant they were amongst us, cutting and hacking. There was no longer front or rear; they enveloped us on all sides. The carnage was fearful, but we were not the sole sufferers. Dennis and I fought one on each side of

the major, and gradually worked our way through the press to a little hillock, where we took our stand. This formed a sort of rallying-ground, to which the rest of our men cut their way. None of them will ever forget the major. Again and again he was hit, blood poured from him in streams, but still he kept his feet and cheered us on anew. At last he fell, and with a great shout the enemy redoubled their efforts. But even his death—for we concluded he was killed—proved of service to us. Dennis and I covered his body, while the Americans, wild with rage, literally threw themselves on the foe. So fierce and sudden was the onslaught that the Costers were borne back a little space, which enabled us to lift the fallen man and bear him out of the strife. That was the end of the fight. The enemy made no further effort, and we were only too glad of the opportunity to collect our wounded and withdraw. As you know, the major was not dead; but I greatly fear he will never head another charge."

A heavy sigh escaped from me involuntarily; Philip's words were but the articulate expression of my own thoughts.

"Have your own hurts received attention?" I asked presently.

"Yes; they were not serious. A few trifling scratches —mere flesh wounds."

After Philip had gone, I put on my cap and walked to the hospital. Here I found that Don Miguel still lay unconscious and insensible, so I proceeded to the colonel's.

Hiram met me at the door. "No," he said in answer to

my question, "he has not inquired for you. There has been a constant stream of officers since the early morning—the room is filled with them now. If the chief were an ordinary man, the excitement would kill him."

But Walker was not an ordinary man, and though his body was consumed with a raging fever, he confronted the increasing dangers with a calm mind and resolute will.

As day succeeded day, the situation became critically grave. From all quarters came news which might well have disheartened any but the very boldest. Guardiola threatened us from the north-east, the troops of San Salvador from the north-west, while on the south were the Costa Ricans, flushed with the glow of a temporary success.

Nor were these the only dangers against which the sick man had to guard. The Leonese, cowed by the defeat at Santa Rosas, were weakening in their allegiance, the old Servile party made no secret of their hostility, and already many members of La Falange had deserted to the enemy.

One morning, as I was proceeding to the hospital, Captain Conway brought me orders to hold myself in readiness for instant service. "You are to select the speediest horse in the stables, lieutenant," said the officer. "I cannot say exactly what is required, but I fancy it is a case of dispatches."

Returning to my quarters I equipped myself for a long and dangerous ride, and requesting Trevethik to groom and saddle the same horse which had once carried me to Rivas, I set out to visit Don Miguel.

To my unspeakable joy I found him perfectly conscious, and though painfully weak, he managed feebly to return the pressure of my hand. His eyes travelled slowly over me, and as he caught the glint of my spurs he looked eagerly into my face.

I read and answered the unspoken question. "Special service," I said. "At present I do not know its nature, except that it involves my absence from Granada. Thank God, my dear Miguel, that you are able to recognize me before I go!"

He smiled peacefully, like a little child, and once more his fingers closed round my hand.

"Ah, my friend," I continued, "it has wrung my heart to see you lying there so still, with eyes that looked into mine and yet saw nothing; but now the worst is over. I have sent to Luis; he will come and fetch you home. Good-bye, dear friend; may God in His mercy hasten your recovery!"

His lips moved, and bending over him I heard him whisper, "God bless you, dear Colin!"

Fortunately for my self-control, I was prevented from displaying my emotion by the entrance of a soldier, who came to inform me the colonel was waiting. With a last gentle pressure of the hand I turned away, my eyes dimmed with tears.

At the door I encountered the surgeon. "Ah, lieutenant," he exclaimed cheerfully, "been to see the major, eh? I was sending for you when you came. I can answer your question with more confidence now—your

friend will recover. Not perfectly, you know; his soldiering is done with, but there is no reason why he should not live for many years."

This was a little consolation, and it was in a mood unusually cheerful I entered the colonel's presence. Although looking dreadfully worn and ill, he was seated at his desk writing.

"Well, Colin," he remarked pleasantly; "ready for work? That's right. I would not let you go with Schlessinger because I imagined I might need your services, and I was not mistaken. By the way, how is Major Pacheco?"

"I have just left him, sir. He is conscious but extremely weak, though Dr. Sparrow says he will ultimately recover."

"I am glad to hear it; I owe him my thanks. When he is a little stronger I will pay him a visit. But now to yourself. Can you undertake another ride to Rivas?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good; these dispatches are for Lieutenant-General Butler. I do not anticipate that you will meet with any danger on the road, but should you be hard pressed destroy them. In that case, tell the lieutenant-general from me he is to collect all the troops stationed at Rivas and Virgin Bay, and fall back on Granada. You understand me. The dispatches are of the utmost importance. Carry them right through if you possibly can, but they must not be allowed to fall into the hands of the enemy. And above all things, no delay; do not waste time on the road.

Tell the officer in command to send word instantly, by a trusty messenger, of your safe arrival. And now, good-bye. Remember, I depend upon you."

Trevethik awaited me in the courtyard. "Anything dangerous, sir?" he asked in a tone of grave solicitude.

"I think not, Phil," I replied light-heartedly; "only the risk of a broken limb if my horse should happen to stumble. Farewell, my good fellow; you will see me back shortly, I trust, safe and sound."

"Good-bye, Mr. Foster; but I wish you were taking me with you."

"So do I, Phil, for the matter of that; but I do not think there is much danger. Good-bye, and do not forget Major Pacheco, if there is anything you can do for him."

He touched his hat as I vaulted into the saddle and rode slowly through the open gateway, and when, a few minutes later, I turned my head, he still stood gazing after me earnestly.

For myself, many things combined to put me in good spirits. First and foremost, Don Miguel was better, and though his recovery must necessarily be slow, it was, humanly speaking, sure. Then the prospect of the ride itself, with its element of danger, exhilarated me, while a consciousness of pride at having been selected for this onerous service acted upon my nerves like a tonic.

Our own pickets extended a considerable distance, and within these there was of course nothing to be feared. Still I did not fail to take precautions, and rode warily,

knowing that amongst the natives at least it was difficult to distinguish friends from foes.

Toward dusk I heard behind me the clatter of a horse's hoofs, and presently a strange horseman ranged himself by my side. There was barely sufficient light to distinguish his features, but I saw he was a half-breed, partly Spanish, partly Indian. He was a slight, spare man, with a swarthy complexion, well but not ostentatiously attired, and he spoke like a person of education.

"Good evening, señor," he began; "if you have no objection, I would like to ride in your company. The road is lonely, and two can meet danger better than one."

"You are welcome to ride in my company, friend," said I; "but, as you perceive, my pace is somewhat rapid, while as to danger I know of none."

"Ah," he replied, "you are young, and your dress proclaims you to be an officer of La Falange. To you, danger is a byword; you do not understand its significance. I, on the contrary, am old, and a man of peace, and gladly shelter myself beneath your protection."

After this we rode several miles without further speech, and, but for a trifling circumstance, no suspicion of the stranger's honesty would have entered my mind. It was but a little matter, and looking back upon the event I could never quite understand why it should have so powerfully excited my distrust.

I have mentioned I was riding a very strong and speedy animal; in fact, with the exception of the colonel's own particular mount, there was not a horse in the army which

could live with him in a five miles' gallop. In obedience to my instructions, I pushed ahead with all possible swiftness. I was a fair rider, and knew how to get the most work out of the animal I bestrode without causing it to founder. Now, what struck me with a strange significance was the fact that, although the pace, for a long distance, was a terrific one, the stranger's mare kept by my side without betraying the least sign of fatigue or even of exertion.

She was a beautiful animal—a low, lengthy bay, with shining coat, and a white star on her forehead. She had a splendid action, easy and graceful, and covered the ground with scarcely an appearance of touching it. Swift as the pace was, I knew she could, if necessary, leave me in a few minutes far behind.

How came this peaceful traveller to be in possession of such a magnificent creature? As I write this now, after the lapse of years, I am tempted to look upon it as an irrelevant and childish question. On that memorable night, however, it appeared to be of the utmost importance, and I was glad our positions were so arranged as to make it utterly impossible for my fellow-traveller to attack me at a disadvantage.

Neck and neck we thus rode for miles, till in the gathering gloom I could hardly perceive my companion's hand. Then I slackened pace, a movement instantly imitated by the stranger.

"Friend," I said boldly, but with secretly quaking heart, "since you are acquainted with the district, while I am

not, do you ride a little in advance; my horse will follow in your track. Have no fear; I shall be close at hand if aught in the shape of danger should come."

For a moment he seemed to demur, and thinking the crisis had arrived, my hand stole instinctively to my revolver. However, after a second or two of hesitation, he consented to the proposition and led the way.

It must have been about midnight when he suddenly stopped. "There is a house somewhere in the district," he said; "we had better seek it and put up. Your horse must be tired out."

It was now my turn to hesitate; I knew not what to do. The stranger's last statement was literally correct—my poor animal was utterly exhausted. In addition, I knew nothing as to my whereabouts; and if my mysterious companion really intended mischief, it would be easy for him to procure assistance and intercept me a little distance ahead. On a strange road, and unable to proceed at more than a walking pace, I was in a hapless plight; so finally deciding that matters could not be much worse, I determined to confront the new danger.

These thoughts flashed through my mind in a very short time, and there was little apparent delay before I said, "We will endeavour to find this shelter, my friend; in which direction does it lie?"

"On our right hand," he answered; "keep close to me."

"I suppose the inmates of the house are honest folks?"

"Yes, I know them well; they will do us no harm.

Ah! there is a light. May the saints be praised! we are out of our difficulty."

For myself I did not feel quite so certain of this; still it would not do to appear mistrustful, and, answering with assumed cheerfulness, I pushed steadily on.

The house, or rather hut, was in a dilapidated condition, and as we drew near a chorus of fierce growls proclaimed the presence of numerous dogs. Of these the stranger took no notice, but riding calmly up, knocked at the door with quick, sharp strokes.

"Open, friend," he cried; "we are peaceable travellers on our way to Rivas, and crave an hour's shelter beneath your roof. I am known to you, and my comrade is a young American officer from Granada."

The door was slowly opened, and a man, rubbing his eyes sleepily, appeared with a lantern.

"Ah, señor," said he, in a gruff voice, which I thought sounded not altogether unfamiliar, "is it you? You are always welcome to my humble dwelling. It is but poor accommodation; still you can rest yourselves, and the animals will find standing-room in the out-building. Follow me, señors. Have no fear of the dogs, they will not harm you."

The suspicion floating dimly in my mind became changed into certainty when we reached the apology for a stable. He of the surly voice was none other than my old acquaintance Josef. This was an unpleasant discovery, which did not increase my desire to make a prolonged stay in this desolate spot. However, it was too

late now to withdraw, so putting on a bold front, I remarked gaily, "Well, Josef, have you forgotten me?"

At the sound of my voice his face grew black with anger, and he would probably have made a passionate reply, had not the stranger anticipated him.

"Ah," he exclaimed in a low musical voice, "you know each other, you two. How charming! It is quite a meeting of old friends."

"Not exactly, señor. At our last meeting I believe I had the honour of breaking Josef's pistol-arm with a shot from my revolver!"

"Then you are—"

"Lieutenant Foster of the Nicaraguan army, at your service."

"Ah! I have heard of you; our poor Josef there has told me. But he bears you no malice. Every one is aware how you interceded with your colonel and saved him from being hanged. Since then he has regarded you as his best friend.—Is it not so, Josef?"

"Yes," replied Josef with a growl; "I owe you no ill-will, young sir!"

"Then let bygones be bygones," I answered cheerfully; "and as an earnest of our new alliance, perhaps you will find a feed for my horse."

He pressed me to go into the hut and leave him to attend to the animals; but finding I preferred superintending the operation myself, he at length yielded, and fetched a bucket or two of beans with a little fodder.

"There," he said, after giving them some water. "Now,

señors, you can make the best of what accommodation my house affords."

This was not much. The interior of the hut was almost bare, and in the shape of provisions he had little to offer but a jar of fiery *aguardiente*, which he poured into calabashes.

The stranger, I noticed, drank moderately of the national beverage; but Josef, perhaps in order to atone for the abstemiousness of his guests—for I declined to partake of it—swallowed large quantities, drinking the intoxicating liquor as if it had been water.

This at first gave me great satisfaction, as I fully expected he would roll over like a log and fall asleep; but my hopes died away when I perceived that his potations produced no effect.

Once I caught a rapid interchange of glances between the two men, and this did not increase my sense of security. If they really intended evil against me, my position appeared hopeless. For a successful fight the odds were too great. The stranger alone I might have managed, but Josef, with his herculean strength, could have crushed me easily.

The one point in my favour was the weakness of the door. It possessed no fastenings beyond a simple latch, and could quickly be opened.

My sole hope of safety lay outside the hut, and even then the path would be strewn with difficulties. My horse could not be depended upon as an aid to escape—the poor animal could not gallop a mile. That, however, did not dishearten me, as I had no intention of using him.

Again: the fierce band of savage dogs would prove a very real danger; but it could not be avoided, I must run the gauntlet.

And after all I might be wearying myself with idle fears. True, Josef was a scoundrel, but it did not follow he was in league with his chance guest.

But who was this second man? Was he really a harmless traveller? Was he even a stranger? I could not decide. At times his features seemed familiar to me, and yet I could not remember having met with him.

The suspense, however, was becoming intolerable, and I resolved to put their intentions to the test. Selecting a corner of the room nearest the door, so that I could not be cut off from the sole means of exit, I wrapped myself in my cloak and lay down.

"Call me directly the day breaks," I said, simulating a sleepy tone; "I wish to push on without unnecessary delay." And Josef promised I should be roused.

My fingers clutched the handle of my revolver, and I so arranged my wrap that, besides being able instantly to divest myself of it, I could command a view of my companions.

For a time nothing of importance occurred. They continued to converse on indifferent topics until my heavy breathing convinced them that I slept. Suddenly the stranger paused in his conversation, and stole a cautious glance towards me.

This was the beginning of a pantomimic display which soon convinced me of my perilous position. First he

undid his coat, and half drawing out a letter nodded energetically in my direction. Josef's face broadened with a grin, which did not lessen when his companion imitated the action of transferring a paper from my pocket to his own.

With a side-glance at the knife in his belt, Josef drew his hand significantly across his throat. "Safer!" he said carelessly, and the other nodded approval.

During this performance I continued to breathe with an even regularity, so as not to excite their suspicions, but I grew hot and cold by turns. Until one of them extinguished the light I was safe, and I waited with impatience for the moment to arrive. At last the stranger, as if tired, lay down on the floor, and the next instant the room was in total darkness.

Now was the time both of my danger and opportunity. I did not hesitate a second; indecision in such a situation would have proved fatal. Lightly casting aside my cloak I fired point-blank at the spot where Josef had last been standing, and bounded toward the door. But I was not yet free. A scream of pain proclaimed the fact that my own shot had taken effect somewhere, but as my hand reached the latch, a bullet whizzed past my head and embedded itself in the woodwork.

This was speedily followed by a second, which luckily did no hurt; then I heard a heavy breathing, and felt the thrust of a sword in my left arm. Before the stroke could be repeated, I turned and flung myself upon my adversary, hugging him with both arms. From his build I judged he

must be my treacherous guide, but the darkness was too great for me to distinguish him clearly.

The struggle was a desperate one; for me it was a matter of life or death. We uttered no sound save the hard deep breathing caused by our violent exertions, but from the centre of the room came the groaning of the wounded man. There in the darkness we stood locked in each other's arms, swaying alternately to and fro.

My antagonist, though slightly built, had muscles of iron, and his swelling veins stood out like knotted whipcord. He was my superior, too, both in skill and activity, and despite the greater weight and brute force which I possessed, matters were going hardly with me.

Moreover, a further danger presented itself. Josef, either recovering from his hurt or stung to madness by its pain, began to crawl towards us. Uttering a fierce oath, he shouted to his colleague to hold me a little longer, and I heard him dragging his body across the floor.

The situation now appeared almost hopeless, and I was beginning to despair, when I recollected a wrestling trick which Trevethik had taught me. Loosening my hold for an instant, I grappled my opponent firmly round the waist, and placing one knee against the small of his back, lifted him, with a dexterous twist of the leg, from the ground. He was now completely in my power. Strive as he might he could not move, and planting my feet firmly, I swung him clean over my shoulder.

Almost before his body touched the floor, I was outside, and found myself, as I had anticipated, in perhaps still

greater danger. The place swarmed with dogs, whose savage, deep-mouthed bayings sent a shiver through me. Inside the hut was certain death, and here I stood a good chance of being torn to pieces.

The scanty light just enabled me to see their dusky forms, and luckily chance afforded me the opportunity of scoring the first move of the game in my favour.

My fingers were on the handle of my revolver when a huge beast leaped with wide-opened jaws right into my face. I could not miss—the muzzle was not half an inch from his head—and with a howl of agony the ferocious animal toppled over dead. This gave me a moment's respite, as the remainder, appalled by their leader's death-cry, slunk back.

For a brief instant the road lay open, and I availed myself of it. With a revolver in one hand and a bowie-knife in the other, I darted at full speed towards the out-house. Once there I should be comparatively safe, and it seemed as if my canine foes realized this also. With loud angry growls they gave chase, and I could hear their heavy pantings as they shot after me.

The space to be traversed was short—could I do it in time? As if in answer to the thought, the foremost of the crowd, missing his mark, sprang past me. My eye followed the flight of the black object, and before the animal could recover from his confusion, I lodged a ball in his body.

"Two," I muttered as he rolled over. I had little time, however, in which to congratulate myself; these novel assailants demanded all my attention. The fate of their

fallen friends somewhat disconcerted them; but there was a singing noise in my ears, and the blood spurted from my nostrils, as I rushed on.

Now the out-house appeared in sight, and in another moment I should be free. Concentrating all my energies into one frantic effort, I made a spring, and pushed open the door just as the savage animals were again upon me.

The stable was in darkness, but I had taken sufficient notice of the arrangements to effect my purpose. The stranger's beautiful mare stood just inside the door. I dared not wait to adjust the saddle, so slipping on the halter, I turned her head and mounted.

Gathering up the reins in one hand, I pushed the door gently open, and faced the yelling pack. But evidently no further danger was to be apprehended from them. The sight of the mare calmed their passions, and I could easily understand she was an old acquaintance.

As a gentle reminder, perhaps, that my safety was still problematical, the sharp, angry swish of a bullet sounded in my ears; the stranger had perceived me.

No doubt it savoured rather of bravado, but I could not resist the inclination to cry, "Ah, friend! are you there? I am truly grieved, but in the hurry of my departure I have taken the wrong horse. Perhaps you will call for your own at Rivas later on."

Without waiting for the reply, which came in the shape of another bullet, I dug the spurs into the mare's sides, and she sprang into the darkness like an arrow sped from a bow.

CHAPTER XVI.

A BRUSH WITH THE "COSTERS."

IT was with gladness of heart I watched the sun rise on the morning after the events recorded in the last chapter. I was, comparatively speaking, out of danger; my baffled enemies were already far in the rear, and each moment rendered the chance of a successful pursuit less. On the whole, I was well satisfied with the result of that which mature reflection told me had been an ill-advised action. The hurt to my arm was of little importance—a mere flesh wound, irritating rather than dangerous; and to make amends I had gained possession of an animal which, I believed, had no equal in the country.

The comments which greeted me on my entrance into Rivas confirmed this opinion. A running fire of questions and exclamations of astonishment was kept up as I proceeded to the residence of the lieutenant-general, but it was not until my arrival there that I appreciated the full importance of my exchange in horse-flesh.

General Butler was the first to enlighten me. I had given the mare to a soldier, with strict injunctions that he should take particular care of her, when the general made

his appearance. Like all the officers whom I had previously encountered, he exhibited extreme surprise, so much so indeed that I could not resist remarking upon it.

"Excuse me, general," I said, "but what is the reason of this universal interest in my mare? Upon my word, I believe half the men think I have stolen her."

His eyes twinkled merrily as he answered, "Well, lieutenant, that, I confess, would be my opinion, only I do not understand how Don Garcia could have been duped."

"Don Garcia!" I echoed feebly; "what an idiot I must have been! Of course it was he, the smooth-tongued rascal! But you shall hear that story later on. Meanwhile I have the honour to announce myself as the bearer of urgent dispatches from the commander-in-chief."

Leading the way to his room he bade me seat myself, while he hastily perused the papers. Then, writing a brief note, which he enclosed in an envelope, he sent for Captain Porter, and directed him to carry it with all speed to Granada.

"I think," he added archly, "it would be advisable to avoid a meeting with Don Garcia. His temper has not been sweetened, I expect, by Lieutenant Foster's cool appropriation of his famous mare."

"Would it not be as well that the captain should hear the story?" I asked; "the recital will not take long, and it will put him on his guard."

General Butler agreed to the proposal, and as briefly as possible I related what had occurred, describing, to the best of my ability, the appearance of Don Garcia and Josef, and the situation of the hut.

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I made a spring (p. 254)

Thus warned, Captain Porter expressed himself capable of accomplishing his mission; and I may note, in passing, that this confidence in his powers was not misplaced, as he succeeded in reaching Granada without mishap.

But to return to myself. Having seen the wants of Don Garcia's mare supplied, I readily accepted the general's invitation to dinner, and together we spent a very pleasant evening.

"Of course," he observed, as he lit his after-dinner cigar, "you are acquainted with the nature of my instructions!"

"In a general sense, yes. In the event of the dispatches having been lost or destroyed, I was to direct you to collect all the troops here and at Virgin Bay, and fall back leisurely upon Granada."

"Quite right. But before withdrawing I am to send out a small party to ascertain the enemy's whereabouts—a scouting party, in fact. Would you like to have the command?"

My eyes sparkled with delight; I did not need to return an answer.

"Very good then," he said; "to-morrow you shall have written instructions. Meantime it will be as well if we take a glance at the map."

He produced one from a portfolio, and together we proceeded to study the topography of the district, the general's observations enabling me to make many notes, which subsequently proved of the utmost value.

Orders had already been sent to the officer in command at Virgin Bay to withdraw his force to Rivas, and it was now

arranged that I should ride over early in the morning and select twenty volunteers to accompany me on my hazardous expedition.

The Costa Ricans had already crossed the border; and having obtained the general's consent, I resolved to traverse the lake in a couple of canoes, and by ascending one of the numerous rivers which run into it, place my small band in the enemy's rear.

"Take care of the mare," I said at starting, for I was riding one of the cavalry horses; "and if I do not return, you may look upon her as a present from me."

"I will not forget," he laughed. "Good-bye; be not too rash. If you have an opportunity, strike home; but remember it is accurate information we require chiefly."

At Virgin Bay I found the preparations for departure well advanced, but at my request for volunteers for a dangerous service the whole company stepped forward to a man. With the assistance of Major Preedy I selected a score, giving the preference to those who understood the management of a boat; and placing ten under the leadership of Lieutenant Brown, I directed him to embark in one of the two boats which had, meanwhile, been prepared for our use. At the same time my own half-score took their seats in the other boat, and amidst the hearty "God-speeds" of those on shore we pushed off on our adventurous journey.

With the exception of General Butler and myself, no one knew the object of the expedition, and none of my party seemed particularly to care. They were bold, reso-

lute fellows, and as long as there was an element of danger to be faced they were perfectly satisfied.

Luckily, the weather continued fair, and a strong breeze sent us scudding merrily across the lake in the direction of Fort San Carlos. Being entirely ignorant of the art of navigation, I handed over the charge of the boat to Dick Carter, a veteran sailor, in whom the lieutenant-general had assured me I could place implicit confidence.

Having no desire to go as far as San Carlos, we steered a course somewhat to the south-east, but avoiding the shore, through fear of being sighted by any of the natives of Costa Rica. Towards night, however, we drew in closer, and I ordered a sharp look-out to be kept for the mouth of the river Frio, up which I intended the boats to be taken.

As it happened, the feat presented a much greater difficulty than I had anticipated. The current was extremely strong, and only by the most tremendous exertions were we able to make any headway. But no obstacles could stop those intrepid men; they pulled with a will, for the sails of course had been furled, and each powerful stroke seemed to lift the boat bodily through the water.

For two or three miles the right bank of the river was skirted by a dense wood, which intensified the gloom of the night. Few sounds met our ears save the savage rush of the waters leaping over their rocky bed, and the monotonous dip of the oars. Occasionally we heard the sudden plunge of some startled alligator, and the calls of the night-birds from the thick trees on our right.

Gradually, however, the forest became less and less

dense, and the country began to open out. The passage, too, became easier, and we were shooting along with a greater rapidity, when Carter, turning the boat's head to the shore, ordered the men to cease rowing. Almost at the same instant, the low, guarded murmur that ran from man to man proclaimed that the others had caught a glimpse of the sight which had prompted the old sailor's action. Three or four hundred yards to the right we could clearly perceive the fitful glow of some dozen watch-fires; and from the sheltered nook into which Carter had run the boats we saw the shadowy forms of the sentinels as their bodies came between the lights and us.

"The Costers, lieutenant!" whispered Carter excitedly; "what are you going to do?"

There were several courses open to us. We might push on and risk the chance of detection by the enemy's sentries, or remain quietly in our hiding-place until the Costa Ricans should take their departure. But as I scanned the faces of my men, I knew neither of these plans would meet with their approval.

"What do you reckon their strength, Carter?" I asked.

"A difficult question to answer, sir, but probably between two and three hundred. I should say they intend making a trip to Virgin Bay by water, but unluckily for them we have come just in time to spoil that little game."

"Do you think there is any chance of breaking them up?"

"Bless you, sir, they'll run like sheep when they hear the crack of our rifles; they can't stand a night-surprise."

The veteran's confidence inspired me with a like spirit, and in a low voice I passed the word for the men to get ready.

Small as my force was, I was compelled to weaken it still further by leaving a man in each boat in order to facilitate our escape should the enemy overpower us by sheer force of numbers.

The landing was effected without noise, and in a few words I explained to the men what they were expected to do.

Dividing them into two parties, I placed one half under the command of Lieutenant Brown, with orders to work round to the right of the Costa Rican camp, while with the remainder I pushed forward in the opposite direction.

As our chance of success depended wholly upon the completeness of the surprise, we proceeded with the utmost caution, and amidst the most profound silence. The first half of the distance was performed in safety, and then began the real danger of the undertaking.

The Costa Ricans then, and right through the war, displayed remarkable judgment in posting their sentries, and were rarely caught napping.

However, we made our way steadily, foot by foot, peering into the darkness, and pausing occasionally to listen for any sounds which might indicate that our presence had been discovered. Had it been possible for any one to have watched us as we pursued our devious way, we must have presented a weird spectacle.

We crept along in Indian file, Carter—whose sense of sight was extraordinarily keen—leading, while I followed

him closely. Now crouching on our hands and knees, now dropping flat on our faces, and taking advantage of every single bit of cover, we glided along from bush to bush, from hillock to hillock, stealthily and noiselessly, like shadowy phantoms of the night.

At length we arrived at our last vantage-ground, a long low mound, to have advanced beyond which, without discovery, would have been impossible. Halting the men by signs at the foot of the rising ground, Carter and I wormed ourselves to the top and looked over.

At our feet stretched the Costa Rican encampment. Two tents formed of upright stakes, covered with a thatch of palm-leaves ingeniously contrived, provided sleeping accommodation for the leaders; the men lay on the ground grouped around the open watch-fires. On the right was a square formed by several heavy carts, and in the centre they had placed the horses.

Carter pointed towards the cumbrous vehicles. "Ammunition," he whispered cautiously, and made signs that it was intended to be transported to Virgin Bay by water.

I was in the very act of expressing my belief in the truth of his supposition, when we were startled by the challenge of a sentinel to our right, followed almost immediately by the sharp ring of rifle bullets, and the loud "Hurrah" of our companions. The same thought flashed into the mind of each—Lieutenant Brown's detachment had reached its destination, and had been discovered by the sharp-eyed sentry.

The effect of the terrifying "Hurrah" was simply magi-

cal. An instant before not a sound had broken the solemn stillness of the night; the whole place had been hushed in a death-like quietude. Now, the cry of our men was answered by a wild yell of rage and terror from the Costa Ricans, who sprang to their feet in disorder.

What followed was a species of pandemonium. The officers rushed from their tents with drawn swords, endeavouring by alternate threats and persuasions to restore order. All their exertions, however, were rendered futile by the overmastering terror which had seized the soldiers. Backwards and forwards they surged, like restless waves of the unquiet ocean, pressing even through the glowing embers of the watch-fires, discharging their muskets aimlessly and at random, while high above all other sounds rose the cry of "The filibusteros! the filibusteros!"

Now charging down into the thick of the terrified, panic-stricken crowd came Lieutenant Brown and his gallant band, while at the same time my own followers, who had been induced with difficulty to remain hidden, uttered a stentorian shout, and plunged after me into the *mêlée*.

As I had calculated, these two separate attacks proved decisive. Had they waited to receive us, the paucity of our numbers must have been revealed; but hopelessly demoralized by the suddenness of the onslaught, and doubtless estimating our strength as equal to their own, they broke and fled in all directions. Our success was complete. In less than five minutes after the furious rush of my own detachment not a single Costa Rican, save the dead and the wounded, remained on the field.

But now a fresh danger menaced us. In the excitement of the fight the embers of the fires had been heedlessly scattered about, and I began to fear lest a stray spark should reach the ammunition carts, as I had no doubt the vehicles were.

Luckily none of our men had been injured, and learning my apprehensions they proceeded with a will to remove the source of danger. In this they were, after much difficulty, happily successful.

Our next care was for the enemy's wounded, who numbered about a dozen. These we removed temporarily to the tents, where Lieutenant Brown, who had some knowledge of surgery, attended to their injuries.

One treasure that fell into my hands afforded me the liveliest satisfaction. It was a paper addressed to General Puola, and contained the Costa Rican leader's plan of campaign. A hasty perusal convinced me of its extreme importance, as, in addition to a sketch of the proposed operations, the document gave a precise account of nearly everything I had been sent to ascertain. With this information in my possession, the object of our expedition was practically accomplished, provided that I could safely transmit it to the lieutenant-general.

Here, however, a difficulty presented itself at the outset. From the captured dispatches I learned that General Puola was on board a Costa Rican vessel, which by this time had very possibly dropped anchor at the mouth of the river. If such were the case, to return in the boats was clearly impracticable. We must inevitably be taken pris-

oners, probably shot—for the Costa Ricans were not very particular—and at all events we should lose the chief fruits of our recent victory.

At this point the sound of a horse's neigh struck my ears, and dimly suggested a plan whereby we might increase the chances of safely conveying the important information to General Butler.

Taking a sheet of paper from my pocket, I hurriedly wrote in English an exact copy of the Costa Rican general's dispatch, and drawing Lieutenant Brown aside I explained to him my design.

In their rapid flight the enemy had not been able to stampede the horses, and about a dozen remained in our possession. Two of these would suffice for the transport of the wounded, and the others I resolved to utilize for our own purposes. This seemed to me a case in which division instead of union would prove of the greater service, and Lieutenant Brown agreed with me. He was to re-embark his men at once, and endeavour to reach Virgin Bay with all possible dispatch, while those of us who were left would perform the journey by land.

We gave our comrades a hearty cheer as they marched off in the direction of the boats, and then immediately began to prepare for our own departure.

The two matters which caused me the most concern now were the disposal of the Costa Rican wounded and the destruction of the captured ammunition. The former I determined to convey to the nearest village, and, unloading the roomiest cart, yoked two horses to it, tandem-fashion.

Then we wrapped the sick men up as well as we could, and placed them carefully in the vehicle. The filibusters entered into the spirit of the thing with great zest. All the animals being draught-horses were naturally without saddles, but this deficiency did not trouble my men, who looked forward to their novel ride in high glee. At length all was in readiness, and the little cavalcade, with the exception of Carter and a man named Pearce, who had volunteered to destroy the ammunition, set out.

Having reached a safe distance from the scene of operations, we drew up and waited. Save for an occasional groan from the wounded soldiers, there was nothing to remind us of the fierce conflict which had recently taken place. The enemy had vanished utterly, leaving no sign. All was still. For miles around, as far as the eye could see, there existed no sign of life. Suddenly the silence was broken by a mighty roar; the earth trembled beneath our feet; and high into the air leaped a broad vivid sheet of flame, tingeing the heavens themselves with its lurid conflagration. In quick succession report succeeded report, each deafening in its intensity, and tongue after tongue of fire shot upwards to the clouds. Fortunately we had taken the precaution to dismount, and were thus able more easily to pacify our terrified animals.

For a long time we remained watching this magnificent spectacle, until, having completed their task without injury, the two men rejoined us, and we resumed our march.

As we had to regulate our pace by that of the cart, the rate of progress was necessarily slow, and it was with

unfeigned gladness that about ten o'clock in the morning I caught sight of a human habitation.

On our left hand, almost hidden by a thick growth of trees, stood a large hacienda, which, according to the information volunteered by one of the injured men, belonged to Don Jose Marena, a wealthy aristocrat, whose sons were officers in the Costa Rican army.

Here I concluded to part company with my prisoners, so, tying a handkerchief to the end of my rifle, I rode slowly in the direction of the courtyard.

It was plain that the news of the engagement had preceded us; the gate was closed and securely barred, and the yard was crowded with a body of armed retainers. Conspicuous amongst this rabble was a tall, fine-looking man, with a flowing white beard, and of venerable appearance.

To him I addressed myself, guessing instinctively that he must be the owner of the hacienda.

"I believe I have the honour of addressing Don Jose Marena," I began; "I am Lieutenant Foster of the army of Nicaragua."

The old gentleman bowed icily, but made no other response.

"You are doubtless aware," I continued, "that early this morning a body of your countrymen met with a heavy defeat near the Frio River. A few of your wounded were left on the battle-field, and consequently fell into our hands. Prompted by a sentiment of humanity, our leader has ordered me to convey these unhappy sufferers to a place of

safety. I feel assured I cannot err in placing them under the protection of Don Jose Marena."

To this little speech the Spaniard responded with a courtly bow, and slightly raising his hat, said, "I thank your commander for his generous consideration, and will gladly take charge of my unfortunate countrymen."

"In that case, señor, my task is accomplished, and I will bid you farewell." Saluting him ceremoniously I turned my horse's head and, accompanied by the filibusters, rode off.

Freed from the restraint of the lumbering vehicle we travelled along gaily, the men chatting and laughing as if we had been bound on a pleasure trip, and sublimely unconscious of the ludicrous figures they presented.

To the majority of them riding meant sitting upon a horse's back, and the grotesque attitudes they assumed in the performance of this feat brought tears of laughter into my eyes.

However, they kept their seats, which after all is the main thing; and early in the afternoon we entered a small town, from which most of the inhabitants had fled at the first intimation of our approach. Those who remained greeted us with cries of "The filibusteros! the filibusteros!" mingled with abject supplications that we would spare their lives.

Singling out a portly half-breed, who proved to be a kind of innkeeper and justice of the peace combined, I ordered him to provide a substantial meal without delay.

Making a low obeisance he hurried off, and in the

interval of waiting I directed that all the horses of which the town could boast should be brought out for our inspection. They did not form exactly ideal cavalry steeds, but they were superior to our own and properly caparisoned, a matter which afforded us much satisfaction.

By this time our worthy host had prepared a repast, consisting chiefly of a mixed vegetable compound, in which the universal *frigole* largely figured. Upon the tables were also placed two or three demijohns of *aguardiente*, from which the men filled their flasks, preferring at the time to quench their thirst by copious draughts of fragrant, steaming coffee.

At the conclusion of the meal we mounted our borrowed steeds, bade our host farewell, and rode off, followed by the curious gaze of the natives, who were considerably astonished at having escaped so easily from the dreaded "filibusteros."

Thus far our expedition had proceeded without the slightest mishap. Indeed, I did not anticipate serious danger until we reached Guanacestra, as General Mora had stripped the country of every available fighting-man in order to swell the number of his troops.

We lay that night on the outskirts of a small wood until the dawn, when, after a frugal breakfast, we made a fresh start, and pushed on rapidly in the direction of Nicaragua.

On this day we were compelled to exercise a greater amount of caution, as we were rapidly approaching the district in which the Costa Rican army lay. Once or twice,

indeed, we narrowly escaped riding into a detachment of their troops. Luckily the information contained in the intercepted dispatch prevented any necessity for coming to close quarters, and we consequently made a wide detour around the camp.

The country beyond stretched away in a gently undulating plain, and we were riding leisurely along, congratulating ourselves on the easy accomplishment of our mission, when Carter touched my arm.

"No good ever comes of shouting before we are clear of the wood," he exclaimed grimly. "Unless I am greatly mistaken, we have a bit of sharp work before us."

We drew rein and gazed in the direction to which the veteran pointed. At a distance of perhaps half a mile appeared a small compact body of cavalry, numbering probably some fifty or sixty men. They were Costa Ricans returning from a similar errand to our own, and it was wellnigh impossible to avoid them. They had caught sight of us, and were advancing rapidly, yelling and brandishing their swords.

I looked at my men; they were critically examining their revolvers.

"We shall not await their attack," I said quietly, "but cut our way through them."

With a fierce "Hurrah!" the filibusters rose in their stirrups, and with a shout of "Walker and Nicaragua!" we dashed furiously forward.

Neither were the enemy lacking in courage. Savagely spurring their horses, and yelling "Santa Rosas! Santa Rosas!" they charged bravely toward us.

The combat, while it lasted, was terrible in its fierceness. Riding up to within a few feet of the foe, the filibusters, holding their revolvers in their left hands, fired volley after volley with deadly precision, and then dashed into the midst of their opponents, who already began to show signs of weakening.

Forcing our way through at the sword's point, we wheeled round for a fresh charge. The Costa Ricans, however, did not wait to be attacked the second time; with a cry of dismay they broke and fled.

Considering the exciting nature of the struggle, our casualties were very trifling, the only serious case being that of Carter, who had been shot in the breast.

During the remainder of our journey we met with no incident worth recording. On arriving at Rivas we found Lieutenant-General Butler had already fallen back upon Granada, and I gladly availed myself of the opportunity to embark upon a little steamer just leaving Virgin Bay for the capital.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BARRICADE AT RIVAS.

IMMEDIATELY upon our arrival at Granada I hastened to the general's quarters, in order to present my report and ascertain if any news had been heard of Lieutenant Brown.

Walker received me with extreme cordiality, and his first words set my mind at ease with regard to the fate of my brother officer.

"Yes," he said, "by great good luck, the lieutenant managed to get through in safety, and I have already made use of the information he brought. Now I wish to hear an account of your doings subsequent to the affair at the Frio."

When I had finished the recital, he said, "I am well pleased with you, Colin. Your conduct deserves commendation, more especially the kindness you displayed towards your wounded enemy. Never forget that cowardice and cruelty are, speaking generally, twin brothers. Now, I expect you are impatient to visit your friend Pacheco. Yesterday you would have found him in hospital, but this morning he has been removed to a house which I have

placed at his disposal. He is recovering slowly but surely, owing in great measure to his sister's tender nursing."

"His sister!" I echoed wonderingly; "is his sister here—in Granada?"

It was truly a pleasant surprise when Colonel Walker proceeded to inform me that, on receipt of my message, all Don Miguel's relatives had hurried over from Leon.

"Trevethik will conduct you to the house," added the colonel, as I prepared to take my leave; "he and Brogan are by this time quite friends of the family."

The story of our successful ride had meanwhile been extensively circulated, and on the way to my quarters I received the most hearty congratulations from both officers and men.

As it happened, Trevethik and the Irishman were on duty, so I had to find my way alone to Don Miguel's. This, however, did not prove a difficult task. Every one appeared to know the gallant Nicaraguan's residence, and within a short time I stood at the gate.

The first to greet me was Don Luis, whose face brightened as he recognized his visitor.

"Colin!" he cried; "can it really be Colin? This will be glorious news for my brother; he has been very anxious about your safety. Better? Oh yes; he is much improved, but still very weak. Let us go inside; Inez and my mother are with him."

Opening the door softly we entered the invalid's room, and the two ladies came forward eagerly to welcome me. Miguel, poor fellow, could not rise from his couch, but his

features were illumined by a happy smile, and he pressed my hand as I bent over him.

"Thank God, Colin," he whispered gently, "that He has brought you safely through another danger! Now indeed I am content."

I spent the remainder of the day in the midst of this family group, and very pleasantly the time passed. I had to relate again the story of my encounter with Don Garcia—a garbled version of which they had already heard—and my adventures amongst the Costa Ricans.

Then in return Inez recounted all that had happened since my departure from Leon—the return of Luis, the arrival of my messenger, the hasty journey to Granada, and the kindness the whole family had experienced at the hands of the filibusters, including dear old Trevethik and his inseparable comrade.

"They are good men, those two," whispered the sick man feebly; "lions in fight, and yet tender-hearted as women. I would that I could reward them for their devotion."

"They would regard the offer as an insult," I answered. "Men like Trevethik and Brogan do not look for rewards; a word of praise, and the consciousness of having done their duty, are all they care for."

"I believe you are right," he said thoughtfully; "and yet a word of thanks seems but a poor return for their services."

"There you err, my friend. These men are gentlemen. Rough and uncouth if you will, imperfectly educated,

totally devoid of polish or culture, yet gentlemen all the same. That they are not the finished article, I admit; they lack the hall-mark of society. But with this exception, they possess every essential characteristic of gentlemen. They are brave yet unassuming, upright and honest, doing their duty nobly and without fear. They have a kindly consideration for the feelings of others. They hate meanness and cruelty and every form of vice; they love justice and truth. What can a reward to such men as these be but a degradation, an assumption of superiority on the part of the giver? Believe me, they value your gratitude, expressed or implied, more than all the rewards in the world."

Don Miguel seemed rather astonished at this view of the case, but his brother assented to the truth of my remarks.

"That is the great mistake which people in our position make," he said. "We are apt to imagine that unless a man possesses the outward attributes of a gentleman, he must necessarily be destitute of gentlemanly instincts. But I fear our discussion is not particularly interesting to the ladies. Perhaps Inez will favour us with a little music."

They were all skilful musicians, and while I sat by my friend's side, conversing with him in low tones, Don Luis and his sister played and sang.

It was, as I have said, a delightful time; and yet I have rarely felt so sorrowful as on that night, when, having bidden them adieu, I turned to walk to the barracks. In spite of their friendship, perhaps even because of it, I was oppressed by a strange sense of loneliness.

For the first time I fully realized the pathetic sadness of my position. The innocent happiness of that household was to me like a glimpse of the paradise from which I was debarred. No gentle mother's glance would ever rest on my face with a fond pride; no sister's pitying lips would ever caress my hot brow; I could lean on the arm of no stalwart brother. Should some chance bullet stretch me lifeless on the earth, there were none of my flesh and blood who would mourn my death, even for a passing hour.

And yet what right had I to grumble? Had I not a number of devoted friends as dear to me as any brothers and sisters could have been? I became ashamed of my gloomy despondency, and resolved that it should trouble me no more.

All the time which could be spared from duty I spent at Don Miguel's house. It became my home, and the remembrance of the happy hours I passed with these dear friends has never left me.

But as the days slipped away my visits became scarcer and briefer. By degrees the situation became so grave that the officers had little time for anything save their immediate and pressing duties.

The Costa Ricans hemmed us in on the south, and their resolute bearing inspired the rest of their allies with an extra courage. Our unlucky disaster at Santa Rosas had given them a moral superiority, which their leaders were not slow to take advantage of. Indeed, at all times, the Costa Ricans proved by no means despicable foes. The rank and file were brave: the officers, many of whom were

Europeans, were skilful and sagacious; and all alike were in deadly earnest.

They had advanced far beyond the frontier. Virgin Bay was held by their troops; they were massed in force at Rivas; and each succeeding day rendered them more threatening and formidable. At length our gallant leader determined to make one stupendous effort to drive these daring foes from their position, and on the seventh of April orders were issued for four hundred Americans and a hundred natives to hold themselves in readiness.

It was late in the evening when I reached Don Miguel's residence. The day had been an exceedingly busy one; but I could not go away without wishing them farewell, more especially as we knew full well the dangerous nature of our expedition.

The parting was very melancholy, and its sad nature did not tend to raise my spirits. Inez and her mother shed tears, and on the face of each brother there was a very grave expression.

"Good-bye, dear Colin," said Miguel; "let us hope you will return in safety."

"*Au revoir!*" exclaimed his brother more cheerfully; "do not expose yourself unnecessarily. Recollect, true valour is a very different thing from foolhardiness. We shall wait anxiously for news."

"Farewell!" I answered, with assumed lightness of heart, though I expect the acting deceived no one. "One good blow at the enemy, and the country will settle down in peace."

"*Quien sabe?*" replied Luis, and with this enigmatical phrase ringing in my ears I rode slowly away.

A strange instinct forewarned us we were about to engage in a very desperate venture, and the knowledge found expression in the extra seriousness of the men. Not that there were any signs of weakness or irresolution. Promptly at the bugle-call the troops fell into their places; but there was an added gravity and sternness in the cheers which greeted their leader, that betokened a knowledge of the arduous nature of their task.

Walker, plainly dressed, but mounted upon a magnificent charger, placed himself at the head. He wasted little time in words, but pointing with his naked sword in the direction of Rivas, he said simply, "My lads, remember Santa Rosas!"

The effect was electrical. I had heard the filibusters cheer on many different occasions, but the response to this brief address startled even me. It lacked the gay and joyous ring, the utter, light-hearted *abandon* which generally characterized it; and I did not like the change. There was a grim fierceness in the sound that reminded me of the subdued growl of a wild beast.

In direct opposition to our usual custom, we marched along in almost complete silence. There were no snatches of song, no rough jests, no merry flashes of repartee, only now and again a low hum of conversation, in which I caught an allusion to the massacre at Santa Rosas, and the ferocious cruelty of the Costa Ricans.

No incident worthy of chronicling occurred on the march,

until early on the morning of the eleventh, when we had arrived within a few miles of our destination.

Thus far we had encountered no opposition. The enemy's scouts, if indeed they had penetrated so far into the interior, had fallen back noiselessly before us, making no sign. All was bare, and silent, and desolate; we seemed to be in a land where death reigned triumphant.

We were marching steadily along after our last bivouac—alas! for how many of our poor fellows was it in truth the last—the advance-guard well in touch with the main body, when, suddenly springing as it were from the very earth, appeared a swarm of horsemen.

With a savage yell they literally flung themselves upon the head of our force, essaying again and again with obstinate but insane bravery to break their way through. For nearly ten minutes they continued their efforts, and not until a dozen men had dropped lifeless from their saddles did they begin to perceive the futility of the attack, when, still uttering cries of rage, they drew off and disappeared.

"Warm work, Foster," said a young officer named Blake, who rode by my side, and who was busily engaged in seeing to his revolvers; "by my faith, the beggars have plenty of pluck."

He was a handsome, fair-haired lad, with deep-blue eyes and a sunny smile on his frank open face. He had not long joined, and this was his first experience of active service.

Ah me! poor Blake! I can see him now, riding

proudly at the head of his men, his eyes sparkling, and his lips opened to utter a merry jest.

And as my eyes close dreamily there rises before me another picture. I see that muscular, well-knit frame stretched senseless on the blood-stained soil. I see the face, a little time back so joyous and beautiful, now white and ghastly in death; and as I watch, the rounded limbs quiver with a convulsive shudder, and there rings in my ears an awful shriek, as the freed spirit passes from its mutilated tenement of clay. Then from my own heart goes up to heaven a silent prayer that the time shall speedily come when, in the words of the ancient book, men shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks.

But at the time of which I write we had little opportunity for meditation. We had to do, not to think; not to reason, but obey. Before us lay the town of Rivas, where twice previously we had fought and suffered, and where so many of my present gallant comrades were destined to end their earthly career.

Our leader's orders were, as usual, simplicity itself. Having divided his force into four divisions, he directed that the town should be entered simultaneously by as many different routes. The various bodies were ordered to reunite in the plaza, and then by one powerful combined attack sweep the enemy from the place.

Since our compulsory evacuation of the district the Costa Ricans had not been idle. The defences of the town had been materially strengthened, the most favour-

able positions occupied; the houses had been loop-holed; and strong substantial barricades had been thrown up in the streets to impede, if not altogether to prevent, our advance.

Naturally I formed one of the detachment which followed the lead of the commander-in-chief, and with me were Trevethik and the Irishman.

"Faith," ejaculated the latter comically, as we neared the head of the first narrow street, "it makes me think of the game we used to play when I was a bit of a spalpeen. We called it 'Running the Gauntlet;' but the colonel has altered it into walking. Mr. Foster, sir, ye'd better slip off that nag; they'll be thinking ye're a general of division, and pay ye a lot of extra attention."

"Thanks, Dennis, for the forethought; but I believe I'll ride. Our friend Don Garcia may be here, and I should like him to see how well we have treated his mare."

"Maybe he'll be after sending ye a trifle of a present for your care. See how beautifully the colonel rides! Oh, he's a sojer, and no mistake!"

At this point the Irishman's discourse was cut short by a wild shout from the bottom end of the court and a whistling of bullets, which, luckily, inflicted no damage, and we knew the battle had begun in earnest.

Walker raised his sword, and, with a cheer, we swept on, though every moment the leaden hail became more and more deadly, and several of our men dropped. The Costa Ricans stubbornly contested every foot of the ground. Each house was a fortress, from behind the walls of which

they poured in a merciless fire. But we pushed them back, literally pushed them, from one position to another, until, hot, wearied, and with gaping wounds, we won our way to the plaza.

Occasionally, in the midst of the desperate fighting, we could hear a thunderous discharge—once, a clash of steel followed by a loud hurrah—and we knew our brave comrades were cutting a path for themselves to the rallying-place.

At length, then, the first portion of our work was done; we had gained the plaza and the cathedral, but at what a price! Nearly threescore of our best and bravest lay dead or dying in the paths we had carved out, and our difficulties were only now beginning.

Walker, calmly confident, and surrounded by his staff, sat on his magnificent horse at the head of his men.

In front of us stretched a huge barricade, lined by more than a hundred riflemen, who, themselves sheltered from danger, continued to pour into our ranks volley after volley with a murderous precision. So galling became this fire that young Blake, who stood near me—for both our horses had been shot—said with a laugh, "Faith, Colin, we may as well be killed there as here. Come, let us drive the rascals out."

It was a foolhardy thing to attempt; but the excitement of battle turns one's brain, and I instantly agreed to his proposal.

The next moment, joined by eight or ten other officers as mad as ourselves, we were racing side by side across the

level space which separated us from the enemy's stronghold. The unexpected suddenness of the attack, and the rapidity of our movements, disconcerted the riflemen's aim, and to this I attribute the fact that we traversed the fire-swept plain in safety.

Blake was the first to reach the barricade, and, revolver in hand, he sprang up with a wild cheer. He was not left long alone; in another second we were clambering over the obstacles in front of us and firing at the riflemen, who, seized with panic, retreated rapidly.

Then it was that a huge, bearded foreigner, a German, I believe, single-handed turned the tide. Pointing to our meagre numbers, he addressed the fugitives in fierce, burning words, and finally, placing himself at their head, led them back.

The struggle against such overwhelming odds was naturally tremendous, but for a little time we contrived to hold our own. Again and again they sought by sheer brute force to hurl us back; but the revolvers cracked incessantly, and we did not throw away a shot.

Still the issue was never in doubt. One by one the intrepid officers dropped, their bodies riddled with bullets and scarred by sword-cuts. Brown, who had been my colleague in Costa Rica, fell at my feet with a groan; and the next moment Blake, with one shot through his heart and another through his brain, tumbled headlong.

Three others fell in quick succession. The riflemen, with a shout of triumph, nerved themselves for the last rush; but even before the cry died away from their lips,

a score of burly forms were perceived on the top of the barricade, and the beaten foe slunk back.

Even this, however, was but a minor advantage. We had dislodged the sharpshooters from their cover, but we could do no more. Dogged, patient, and unyielding, the Costa Ricans, massed in full force, stood in our path, and they would not be broken. They took advantage of every obstacle, natural or artificial. The surrounding buildings were packed with their best shots, who poured forth volley after volley unceasingly, until even upon our leader it was unresistingly borne in that the contest was hopeless.

In obedience to his orders we collected our dead and wounded, and retired slowly and in perfect order to the cathedral, whither the enemy did not consider it expedient to pursue us.

The situation was a peculiarly sad and mournful one. All those who did not require the surgeon's care, and several who did, remained drawn up in military array, prepared at a moment's notice to repel the anticipated attack. From the inside of the sacred edifice came the groans and cries of anguish of our wounded comrades, whose injuries were being attended to by the regimental surgeons and their assistants.

To each of us came the same thought: suppose the Costa Ricans, emboldened by our failure, should utilize their vast superiority in numbers, and crush us with an overwhelming force: We had learned by bitter experience how merciless they could be, and we trembled for our unfortunate companions. Luckily, however, our apprehen-

sions were not fulfilled. Cowed by the dreadful slaughter we had already committed, the enemy remained shut up behind his intrenchments, and offered us no further molestation.

To our leader, as to the most reckless and hot-headed amongst us, it had become evident that but one course remained open—we must fall back upon Granada.

All night long the preparations went on, quietly, methodically, but surely, and with the morning light we were ready to march. Not a detail had been omitted, not a single point overlooked. The injured had been treated with tender care, their wounds skilfully dressed, and now those incapable of walking were placed in the rude carts which were to convey them to Granada. Silently we marched off the ground, casting many a wistful backward glance at the town to capture which we had poured out our blood like water.

The Costa Ricans were in no mood to oppose our departure. They had fought bravely and well from behind their barricades and intrenchments; they had contested with an obstinate courage every foot of our progress into the city; but even with their overwhelming superiority in numbers, they clearly recognized they were no match for us in the open. In sullen silence they watched our departure, making no movement, rejoicing doubtless in the farewell of such unwelcome visitors. We had truly failed in our object, and yet to our enemies the victory proved barren and unprofitable.

The news of our return preceded us, and amongst the

crowd that thronged the streets I saw Don Luis and his beautiful sister. He gave me a cordial greeting, and on the face of Inez I perceived a joyous smile.

"Not hurt?" he asked. "And our other friends, have they escaped in safety?"

"Yes," I answered, "we have come well through it: a few scratches more or less, and the loss of my famous mare; otherwise we have not suffered. But Miguel and your mother, are they well?"

"Yes; my brother is so much better that we have made arrangements to return to Leon in the morning. You will dine with us this evening?"

"Certainly, unless the chief requires my services; but I do not think that probable."

The sight of Don Miguel later in the day filled me with joy. Though even now far from strong, he was able to leave his couch, and, with the assistance of one of the members of his family, move slowly from room to room.

"Back from the grave, Colin," he exclaimed cheerfully, as I complimented him upon the visible improvement in his health; "and, under Divine Providence, these," indicating by a wave of the hand Inez and her mother, "are the instruments of my recovery."

They looked at him fondly, and their eyes filled with tears; he was such a shadow of his former self.

Naturally they wished to hear an account of the recent fighting, and as I related the various incidents of the terrible struggle, and told of the deaths of Brown and Blake, the former of whom they knew, a feeling of pity

and sadness stole over them. Tears trickled down the cheeks of the tender-hearted ladies, and even the two brothers were sensibly affected.

"This war is indeed frightful," said Luis, "and I see no end to it. But let us change the subject. To-morrow we return to Leon, where Miguel, I trust, will rapidly complete his recovery. I wish you were to make one of the party."

"I should be delighted to accompany you, but it is impossible. I am weary of this horrible carnage and slaughter, and yearn for a life of peace. But in honour I am compelled to remain with my leader until the end, whatever it may be."

They assented sorrowfully; and as we thought of the probable future awaiting me—a violent death on the battle-field, or the slower torture of a noisome dungeon—we fell a prey to settled melancholy.

I took my final farewell of them that night, as it was uncertain what the morrow would bring forth. The parting was extremely dismal; Inez and her mother wept unrestrainedly, and my own eyes were moist with unbidden tears.

"I will not say 'good-bye,'" murmured the gentle girl; "it is too sad a word. It sounds to me like an eternal farewell, and I hope to see you yet again."

I took her hand and raised it respectfully to my lips. "Adieu, dear Inez, my sweet friend," I said, "and may God's blessing ever attend you! Should I still be alive when this horrid war ceases, be sure my first visit will be paid to your beautiful home in Leon.—And you, Miguel,

my more than friend, with what words can I address you? Sorrow lies heavily on my heart this night when I think of the void to-morrow's sun will create for me."

"We shall meet again, dear Colin," he replied bravely; "how, I know not, but my heart assures me fate does not now sever our intimacy for ever. We shall meet under happier auspices, when war has given place to peace and sorrow to joy. Adieu, dear friend. Like Inez, I will not say 'good-bye;' the parting between us is not yet. A bright sun shines behind those dark clouds, through which, perhaps in the near future, it will penetrate with dazzling radiance."

Luis walked back with me to the gate of the barracks. As he turned to retrace his steps he said earnestly, "Remember, Colin, when danger comes—as it most assuredly will, for your cause is doomed—Luis Pacheco is your friend, even to the sacrifice of his life."

CHAPTER XVIII.

MASAYA.

FOR the first few days after the departure of my Nicaraguan friends, I experienced a sensation of great loneliness; but as the time wore on, I became so overwhelmed with work, that I had little leisure in which to regret their absence.

The failure to drive the Costa Ricans from Rivas did not permanently depress our spirits. At this juncture, indeed, they were still further raised by the arrival of several hundred recruits, doubtless tempted by the rumours of Walker's power. This opportune increase in our strength tended to produce a feeling of security and of ultimate triumph—a belief materially strengthened by the advices which we now began to receive from Rivas.

Throughout the campaign, the Costa Ricans had proved themselves our bitterest and most inveterate enemies. They had inflicted upon us our most disastrous defeat. While Guardiola, eager and yet afraid to strike, was marching and counter-marching his savage troops in the north, the Costa Ricans had crossed the frontier, and practically cooped us up in Granada.

In the previous chapter I narrated our failure to dislodge them from their position at Rivas, and since the repulse of our attack they had added steadily to the defences of the place. The scouting-parties dispatched at intervals from Granada all returned with the same story. Although seemingly afraid to venture into the open, at least until their northern allies were ready to co-operate with them, the Costa Ricans left no stone unturned to render their position unassailable. The most rigid discipline was maintained, lines of watchful sentries were posted, and scouting-parties scoured the surrounding country every day for miles.

A successful attack would have necessitated the employment of our whole force, and Walker dared not imperil the safety of Granada by denuding it of its troops.

But a day arrived when the Costa Ricans fell before a foe more deadly even than the dreaded filibusters. Unseen, unheard, the angel of death with noiseless wings glided through that martial assembly, smiting with stern impartiality high and low, officers and privates alike. In their gambling dens, on parade, whether engaged in pleasure or in duty, men drooped, and shuddered, and died. Before this relentless enemy the hero and the coward were brought to the same level, skill and courage and daring were rendered vain, the sword and the gun were of no avail, for the dread destroyer was that fatal pestilence—cholera. Unluckily for themselves, the habits of the Costa Ricans were by no means cleanly, and this rendered them peculiarly susceptible to the ravages of the disease

The scene, as I witnessed it some time later, was simply appalling. The houses were empty, the streets deserted; nothing in the whole district lived save the carrion birds, those noisome scavengers that had gathered to the feast of the dead. Hundreds of corpses lay rotting beneath the hot rays of a tropical sun, and the awful stench which arose from the decaying bodies was perfectly sickening.

Of all that gallant army, a little while back so full of life and hope, nothing remained. A few hundred worn, attenuated men reached their homes; but ever as they went, the germs of disease went with them. The warm winds wafted the fatal seeds far and wide, till nearly every town and village in that unhappy country became a prey to the pestilence.

Freed by this terrible disaster from our most dangerous foe, we now entered upon a condition of comparative peace. To all appearance the country settled down to a normal state; order was re-established, business was carried on afresh, men and women lived their lives from day to day without fear of danger.

By this time, too, the natives had overcome their dread of the filibusters, owing mainly to Walker's iron control. Stern was the punishment meted out for any act of lawlessness, irrespective of the rank or nationality of the wrong-doer. His laws were like the laws of the Medes and Persians, in that they were not to be broken; and of all that crowd of grim, weather-beaten veterans, not one dared to question his decision.

Yet notwithstanding his severity he gained the love

and the affection of almost all with whom he came into contact, and of this a striking proof was soon to be afforded us.

At this time it was determined to hold an election for President, and by an overwhelming majority Walker was chosen for the office.

On July 12, 1856, the venerable cathedral was once more packed by a dense and enthusiastic throng. Of their own free will, and without the slightest compulsion, the Nicaraguans had raised our leader to the highest position in their country, and they assembled now in immense numbers to witness his inauguration.

The ceremony was a striking and impressive one. Padre Vigil, the good curate of Granada, ever foremost in works of mercy and piety, came to give the blessing of his church, and with him was associated Don Firmin Ferrer, the acting provisional President.

Then before the rapt gaze of that mighty concourse, our beloved leader, soberly dressed in a plain, black suit, and with cold, impassive features, knelt to take the oath.

It must have been a proud moment for the erstwhile American lawyer, but neither his face nor his voice exhibited any trace of his emotions. Clearly and calmly he answered the questions addressed to him, and Don Firmin having administered the oath, the leader of the filibusters stood up—lawful President of Nicaragua.

Even now, when after the lapse of many years I am able to think and write dispassionately of these events, I do not hesitate to affirm that under Walker's guidance

Nicaragua would most assuredly have become a strong and powerful country.

But at home and abroad he had many enemies, who laboured with undying energy to thwart his plans and overthrow his schemes for the welfare of his adopted land.

In Nicaragua itself his difficulties were almost at an end. Under his wise rule, the resources of the country would probably have been developed to such an extent that Nicaragua would have been recognized as the one great state of Central America.

But fate had ordained otherwise. The star which now, bright and clear, shone luminously in the heavens for all men to witness, had reached its zenith; henceforth it was doomed slowly but surely to pale, and ultimately disappear.

The neighbouring states were mad with jealousy and envy. England, afar off, watched with disfavour the stupendous success of this obscure individual; and the short-sighted politicians of his own land threw their weight into the scale against him.

Two months only from the period of his inauguration had elapsed, when the torch of war was once more kindled —this time in the north.

For the moment the Costa Ricans, decimated by the ravages of the cholera, were *hors de combat*, and we had the northern allies alone to deal with.

Under General Belloso, an army, composed mainly of Hondurans, Guatemalans, and San Salvadorians, crossed the frontier, and marched by easy stages to Leon, which they captured with little trouble.

The news of their advance greatly disquieted me, as I feared lest Don Miguel should fall a victim to the deadly enmity of the ferocious Guardiola.

Still anxious concerning the welfare of my friends, I had retired one evening to my room, when Trevethik in an excited state knocked at the door.

"Sorry to disturb you, lieutenant," exclaimed the worthy fellow, "but there is a mounted messenger in the courtyard with a letter which he will deliver to no one but to Lieutenant Foster. I think," he added, "that he has ridden from Leon."

I had partly undressed, but, heedless of my appearance, I hurried into the courtyard where the messenger awaited me.

I recognized him instantly as one of Don Miguel's servants. "Ah, Lopez," I cried, while my voice trembled with suppressed excitement, "you have brought news of your master. Tell me quickly, is all well?"

"Yes, señor," he answered with a grin; "but here is my master's letter," and he handed me the welcome missive.

Placing him in Trevethik's charge, with orders that both he and his steed should be well treated, I ran back and eagerly tore off the covering of the letter.

The communication was very brief, but I perused it with a deep sense of satisfaction; it effectually dispelled all the fears I had entertained regarding my friend's safety.

"Dear Colin," it ran, "judging by my own heart, I feel assured you are consumed with anxiety as to my welfare

under the altered condition of things. I therefore embrace the first opportunity of dispatching a trusty messenger with the assurance that there is no cause for alarm on my account. You have doubtless learned that the allies have made themselves masters of Leon, and that they purpose marching almost immediately upon Granada. Had it not been for Luis, I should probably ere this have paid with my life for the part I have taken in this terrible war. My brother, however, has many powerful friends amongst the leaders of the invading army, and to this fact I owe my safety. There was some talk of holding me as a sort of hostage; but this, happily, has died away. The allies display a very bitter spirit, and I fear there will be a desperate struggle before the end is reached. We are all well, and send you our kindest greetings. That God may guard you in the midst of the frightful perils which are slowly encompassing you, is the earnest prayer of your affectionate but sorrowful friend,

"MIGUEL PACHECO."

Before retiring to rest I wrote a few lines in answer to this welcome letter, and then with a light heart sought my couch.

That Belloso's threat to march upon Granada was not an idle one, we speedily discovered. Day by day our outposts were driven further and further back, till at length the leaders of the allied army reached Masaya, scarcely fifteen miles distant.

The position which the allies had now gained was a most formidable one, Masaya being perched on a hill of the

same name, a thousand feet high, the result of a tremendous volcanic eruption.

To the south lay the lava desert, fitly named "The Hell of Masaya," which barred the road from Granada.

Formidable as the situation was by nature, in Belloso's hands it became little short of impregnable. Everything that could possibly be done by a skilful and courageous leader he did. The approaches were carefully and securely guarded, masked batteries were planted, earthworks thrown up, and the fortress strengthened in every conceivable manner.

Somewhat to our astonishment, Walker took no notice of these preparations, till the enemy, growing bolder, began to display unmistakable signs of activity.

Perched in security on the summit of his frowning cliff, Belloso, like some old Border baron, proceeded to lay the surrounding district under contribution. Night after night, bands of armed men, issuing from their mountain fastness, scoured the country, driving in the cattle, capturing provisions, ill-treating the peaceful peasants, and in some cases putting their unhappy victims to a violent and shameful death.

To this, of course, it was impossible we should tamely submit, and at length the colonel resolved to take action.

On the morning of the 12th of October, we assembled in the plaza, preparatory to marching against Masaya. The spectacle was a brilliant and animated one. The filibusters, eight hundred strong, were attired in new uniforms; bright waving banners swelled proudly to the morning breeze;

the streets were lined with a cheering crowd containing the wives and sweethearts of the men going forth to battle.

The colonel rode slowly from end to end of his little army, and when, the brief inspection being completed, he gave the order to march, the old joyous cheer rose in a thundering volume to the heavens.

How little any of us dreamed what terrible scenes would be enacted in the fated city before we regained possession of it!

At the exit from the town, General Fry, with whom Walker had been engaged in earnest conversation, turned and rode back. To him had been entrusted the task of holding Granada until our return, and right nobly was he destined to perform his mission.

To assist him, Walker left a garrison of one hundred and fifty men, many of whom were actually in hospital, and of the remainder few were fit for active service.

We set out with light hearts and glorious hopes, but as I rode along, mounted on one of the colonel's horses, a feeling of sadness stole over me.

I gazed at our little body, strong, compact, and resolute as ever, but, alas, in many respects how changed! Where were the familiar faces I had been wont to see? In the ranks I knew no one intimately save Trevethik and Brogan, and looking at the officers I felt with a pang of sorrow that they too were strangers.

Loyal, brave, and gallant-hearted they doubtless were, but they were not the men who had been my comrades in

many a situation of danger and peril. I thought of Don Miguel, the lion-hearted Nicaraguan; of Brown and the chivalrous Blake, whose bodies lay rotting in cholera-stricken Rivas. I thought of many others also who had found a nameless grave in this alien land, men who had stood shoulder to shoulder with me when the death-dealing bullets hurtled like hailstones, and like lightning gleamed the flash of naked swords.

But such, alas, is a soldier's life! The hand which to-day grasps ours in loving embrace, to-morrow is cold and stiff; the voice that sounds like music in our ear is stilled for ever; the joyous laugh rings no more; the film of death blots out the winning smile from the bright eyes,—and in compensation we have gained or lost another battle.

The march was performed in a leisurely manner, and it wanted but two hours to midnight when we halted at the foot of the frowning rock. It was a glorious night; the moon was at the full. Afar off we could see the placid waters of the mighty lake, and above our heads shone the watch-fires of the town.

In a very brief space our own fires were lighted, sentinels posted, rations served out, and then, heedless of the morrow's dangers, the men prepared to snatch a few hours' rest before the assault.

As I walked round the camp I was struck by the weird and picturesque beauty of the sight, to which the troops contributed a beauty of their own. Clustered round the fires they sat or lay in groups, their bronzed features darkly red in the ruddy glow. Some few were already asleep, but

for the most part they smoked their pipes, and chatted in low tones of the coming fight.

Approaching a group where Trevethik and Brogan were seated, I heard one of the men say, "Lieutenant Foster, one of the officers who took the barricade at Rivas," and my face glowed at the implied compliment, so ingrained is the love of the applause of our fellow-men.

"Welcome, lieutenant," exclaimed Trevethik, making way for me to approach the fire. "It appears we are to have yet another brush in company. How I wish Don Miguel were here; and yet," reflectively, "he is safer in Leon."

"By the powers," interrupted Dennis, "the Don has had more than his share of hard knocks already."

"Do you think, sir, we shall get the beggars out of that?" asked another, pointing to the huge rock that towered above us.

"Oh yes; the work will be a trifle warm, but they are bound to run in the end."

"I hope so indeed, though I shall not live to see it."

Perceiving my surprise, Trevethik said gravely, "It was a notion of Israel's, sir,"—the man's name was Israel Gray —"that we were discussing when you came up. He has got it into his head that he is bound to 'go under' in the morning."

I looked at the filibuster curiously. He was a tall, athletic man of about middle age, with strong, firm limbs, deep wide chest, and broad back. His hair was iron-grey, and his rugged cheeks were seamed with numerous scars—

an unlikely customer enough, judging from personal appearance, to hold peculiar views.

"I'm sure I don't know, sir," he replied, when I asked him to account for the singular hallucination; "but I shall never go from here alive. I didn't tell the little woman, but I had a suspicion of it when we started, and now I am certain. You see it figures out like this. One night, about three weeks ago, I woke up from a sound sleep. I was all feverish like, and my legs trembled so I couldn't keep them still. At first I reckoned I was in for a stiff bout of illness, and was just about to arouse the missus, when I lost my bearings, so to speak, and mighty cur'ous it was. I wasn't in my little room at all, but out on the side of a hill in broad daylight. Down below was two cannons afiring over my head, and in front I see the colonel, and heard him calling for us to come on. I started to run, when a tall chap ups from behind a rock and pots me. I knowed for sure he had the draw on me, but I lets fly with my rifle all the same, and then I falls flat and don't move. I'd never been in this direction before, but to-night when we got here I recognized the place, and you may calculate for a dead certainty my number is called to-morrow."

He refilled his pipe gravely, and lit it with a bit of flaming wood, for all the world as if he had just concluded an interesting story, which had no particular reference to himself. And yet it was plain he thoroughly believed every word he had uttered.

I reasoned and expostulated with him in vain. He was

calm and collected. He betrayed no symptoms of fear on the one hand, or of bravado on the other; but to all argument he turned a deaf ear.

Only, as I turned away to seek my earthy couch, he said, "I should take it kind, lieutenant, if you would promise to see that the little woman gets my pay. I've left her a tidy little pile, and the two lots ought to keep her comfortable when she gets back to the old folks in the States."

Of course I gave the required promise, and left him expressing his thanks.

Fortunately we had not long to wait ere the coming of the dawn. I could not sleep; Israel Gray's uncanny story had produced too deep and serious an impression.

I saw him as we took up our position after breakfast, and he smiled in a friendly manner, at the same time nodding towards the two howitzers which had been pushed forward to cover our advance.

I turned cold, and shivered slightly at this partial confirmation of his weird narrative. Could it be possible that the remainder of his prophecy would be fulfilled?

My meditations were cut short by a sharp ringing cheer, and the next moment we were charging wildly up the hill, the colonel leading the way. On the first plateau he paused to enable the men to close their ranks, and raising his sword, pointed to the position we had gained.

I looked back instinctively, searching for Israel Gray. Yes, there he was, side by side with Trevethik and Brogan, and at sight of me his face lit up with a calm smile. Thus

far, then, he had escaped; but even as I gazed he brought his rifle to his shoulder, there was a puff of smoke, the whistling of a bullet, and he fell to the ground—Israel Gray had met his fate.

I remained watching while Trevethik stooped and raised the stricken man's head. From my old friend's despairing gesture, however, I perceived clearly that human aid was of no avail, and turning, I pressed on after Walker.

Little by little, and at a great sacrifice of life, we pushed the enemy steadily back to the principal plaza; but here, as at Rivas, we were compelled to halt.

Two other plazas, and the larger portion of the town, remained in possession of the allies; but though our work was far from completed, we felt confident of ultimate victory.

As usual, our opponents intrenched themselves behind their adobe huts, and kept up a heavy and telling fire, which caused us considerable loss.

We had learned by bitter experience the futility of dashing ourselves against those mud-built walls, and yet it was absolutely necessary we should cut a passage through into the next plaza.

Presently a mighty cheer went up from our hardly-pressed troops, and glancing down the hill I saw that the brave gunners were dragging the two pieces of artillery up the slope. A score of stalwart men descended to their aid, and amidst a scene of enthusiasm the howitzers were fixed in a suitable position to play upon the buildings intervening between us and the next plaza.

The day was now, however, rapidly wearing to a close. By the time these engines of destruction had cut a passage night was falling, and Walker resolved to defer the final assault until the morning.

Still, success was only a matter of a few hours more; and crouching around the welcome fires, we congratulated ourselves upon the coming victory. The worst of the business was past—the main defences had been broken through—and we held the enemy, as it were, in the hollow of our hand.

Wrapped in my greatcoat, I lay in a partial doze, speculating dreamily upon Israel Gray's tragic fate, when I became aware of a sudden and unwonted excitement.

The low hum of conversation had given place to an angry buzz; sharp cries of astonishment and rage burst forth from all quarters; and raising myself to a sitting posture, I perceived the majority of the filibusters standing round the fires, engaged eagerly in animated conversation.

As I walked toward the nearest group disjointed phrases reached my ears:—"The Serviles"—"A thousand strong"—"Artillery"—"General Fry"—"Women and children."

What had happened? I quickened my pace to a run, my mind filled with apprehension. It was difficult to understand anything clearly, every one was talking at once. Gradually, however, I began to make out that Granada was in the hands of the Serviles, and that our friends, if not already slain, were in the most imminent danger.

We must go back immediately, that was evident. We must sacrifice the fruits of our hard toil. Masaya would

remain in the hands of the foe; but it was imperative that we should hasten to succour our sick and wounded, our helpless women and children.

Presently the bugles sounded, pickets were called in, the men formed in ranks, and relinquishing the prize already within our grasp, we turned our faces toward the beleaguered city.

Mile after mile was covered without a pause; the ominous news had taken away all feeling of fatigue. We forgot our late exertions; we remembered only that on the rapidity of our march might depend the fate of our helpless compatriots.

Should we be in time? That was the one sole absorbing thought which, to the exclusion of all else, filled our breasts; and to those whose dear ones were shut up in the town the suspense became more and more terrible with the flight of every moment.

As we came in sight of the spires and towers of Granada a wild cheer broke unrestrainedly from all. We caught the sound of the sullenly-booming cannon, and knew that the forced march had not been made in vain.

With redoubled vigour we pushed forward; but before the rescue of our comrades could be effected, many a gallant heart had ceased to beat. Right across the narrow pathway which we were forced to traverse the Serviles had planted a strong battery, served by skilful and resolute gunners.

Once, twice, thrice we threw ourselves at the guns, and each time were hurled back, a bleeding and disorganized

mass. Smoke and flame and deadly murderous missiles the iron monsters belched forth, and our men dropped by scores.

Just for a passing moment even the hardy filibusters quailed before the awful death-shower, and shrank back cowed by the horrible carnage.

But one was there whom nothing could daunt, no danger terrify. Cool and determined, our leader sat with unmoved countenance while the iron messengers of death hurtled by on their deadly errand. His keen sight detected the quiver of irresolution, but ere the sudden fear had time to develop into panic he had converted it into a mad heroism.

Rising in his stirrups, he pointed with his drawn sword right ahead, past the iron battery, to where, from the summit of the great church, the folds of the Lone Star flag fluttered proudly.

High above all the noise and confusion, the roar of the guns, the yells of the Serviles, the shrieks and groans of the wounded and the dying, rang out his clear, shrill tones: "Boys, we will save the old flag or die. Follow me!"

The words were simple enough, and simply uttered, but the effect was magical. Hesitation was thrown to the winds, doubts and fears were swept away, and with a ringing cheer we surged along that fatal passage, like an impetuous torrent that had burst its dam.

Once more the angry cannons vomited fire and death, and, with the exception of Walker, our front rank was literally mown down. But we did not slacken our speed for an instant. Onward we pressed, faster and ever faster,

until, with a cry of triumph, we leaped amongst the guns, and stood blade to blade with our swarthy foes.

No power on earth, I really believe, could have withstood that mad onslaught. We no longer fought like men, but rather like demons. Crash through the crowd of Serviles we went, as if they had been made of pasteboard, and re-forming, plunged once again into the quivering mass.

With wild yells of despair they broke and fled, and uttering a loud soul-stirring "Hurrah" we dashed into the city. Granada was ours!

CHAPTER XIX.

THE EVACUATION OF GRANADA.

PUSHING rapidly through the familiar streets, unmistakable evidences of the fierce nature of the struggle that had taken place met our gaze; but it was not until we reached the wide and spacious plaza that we fully realized the havoc which had been committed.

Here were situated the cathedral, armoury, and hospital, which General Fry, at the first signal of danger, had hastily garrisoned and fortified.

In the great square the Serviles accordingly had established their head-quarters, and the signs of their occupation were plainly visible. Several of the houses had been blown up, others had suffered severely, while the battered walls and doors of the filibusters' refuge bore mute witness to the fury of the attack.

But in a few minutes a far more interesting sight presented itself. The great doors of the several buildings were thrown wide open, and out into the square trooped a crowd of pale-faced women and laughing urchins—the wives and children of the filibusters.

I stepped on one side and watched the many-sided scene

with a sorrowful heart. Alas! how many of the loved ones so eagerly sought for were lying cold and dead on Masaya's hill! How many were heaped in inextinguishable confusion in that death-trap at the entrance to the city!

What a broad vein of tragedy was mingled with that show of happiness! Here, I saw a bearded giant clasping to his breast a woman, down whose cheeks the tears rolled for very joy; there, another holding aloft a tiny toddler crowing with delight. Happy parents and children these —thus reunited!

But others there were for whom my heart ached—pallid, sad-eyed women, seeking here and there in the midst of the joyous throng for the dear ones who should never more return to them.

I watched them gliding in and out, glancing with dumb, wistful earnestness into the faces of the men, only to turn aside time after time with a pitiful despair. They did not seem capable of realizing the bitter truth at once, but wandered persistently here and there, traversing the same paths, passing and repassing the same groups, and ever without result. Then at last from one or another would burst a cry of agony, a half-stifled sob, and, turning away, some heart-broken woman would steal quietly off to her desolate home.

I have read much of the pomp and glory of war—of dazzling uniforms, of gleaming swords and waving banners, of the bugle's stirring notes, of the wild charge, and the glorious cry of victory—but in my memory ever remains a far different picture. I see the fair earth strewn with

mangled bodies and red with the glow of burning houses; I see old men whose grey hairs cannot save them from a fearful death; artless, innocent children doomed to a cruel fate; strong, fearless men cut down in the prime of life; but most vividly of all there rises before me the sight of the hapless women with their pitiful, wan faces, from which all hope has vanished, and in my fancy I hear the snapping of the heart-strings as the sad truth is borne in upon them —that their loved ones have passed into the shadow of the far-off land.

Some such thoughts as these were passing through my mind when Trevethik touched my arm. "This is Mrs. Gray, sir; I thought maybe you would wish to see her. She knows the worst."

I turned and looked at her with a feeling of deep interest and pity. She was literally, what Israel Gray figuratively termed her, a little woman, short and plump, with cheeks from which the roses had but recently been driven. Her large, mournful grey eyes looked into mine with oh! such an expression of patient resignation. She did not cry or moan, she uttered no word of complaint, but I knew the sunshine had been taken out of her life, and that her heart was yonder on that lonely hillside where we had left our fallen comrade.

I scarcely know what I said. I offered some words of pity and consolation, which she did not seem to hear, and presently Trevethik led her unresistingly away.

"She is dazed, Mr. Foster," he whispered; "the shock has paralyzed her brain for a time. To-morrow, perhaps,

she will begin to understand, and meanwhile, no doubt, you will see what can be done for her."

I nodded, and walked toward my quarters, eager to be alone, for my heart was full. When and how would it all end? I asked myself wearily, and in the bitterness of my spirit I was almost tempted to wish I had died with my beloved father in far-off California. But the morrow brought its apportioned tasks, and in the performance of my duties I gradually lost the acute feeling of distress that had seized upon me.

Soon after our triumphant re-entry into Granada, we were greatly cheered by the arrival of General Charles Frederick Henningsen, a distinguished soldier, who brought with him a much-needed supply of arms and ammunition.

The position was now becoming extremely critical, and though as yet we knew it not, we were steadily drawing nearer day by day to the beginning of the end. General Belloso still lay at Masaya, where his army had been reinforced by the remnant of the Serviles who, thanks to the splendid courage and dogged bravery of General Fry and his heroic garrison, had failed in their attack upon Granada. For the present they remained inactive, but formidable supports were being hurried to their assistance, and in a short time they would doubtless renew their attempt upon the city.

Still we did not lose confidence, until one day a strong scouting-party that had been sent south returned with a startling piece of intelligence—bodies of Costa Ricans had been met with on the transit road.

The overwhelming gravity of the situation was thoroughly appreciated by every one. Should we once lose command of the transit road, we could no longer depend upon any fresh addition to our strength in the shape either of men, ammunition, or provisions. Indeed, it could no longer be concealed that we were in the toils, and unless by some extraordinary exertion we could burst asunder the meshes of the iron net gradually enfolding us, our cause was doomed.

The country to the north of Granada was, for the present at least, completely lost, and now the Costa Ricans threatened to hem us in on the south. What was to be done? The problem was a knotty one, by no means easy of solution. In order to drive our new foes from the position they had taken up, we must abandon Granada to the tender mercies of Belloso and his soldiers, thus practically giving them a splendid base for their future operations against us.

Whatever the resolution of our leader might be, we felt that the decision should be promptly made, and as promptly carried into effect. And now I had reason to admire the foresight which Walker had displayed in the early part of the campaign.

Keeping Belloso busy by frequent cavalry raids, and threatening the Costa Ricans by an occasional foray, he pushed on rapidly with his preparations, the first step being the dispatch of all the sick and wounded, accompanied by the women and children, to the island of Omotepe. Fortunately we still held command of the lake, so this portion of his plan presented little difficulty.

"That appears ominous, Mr. Foster," exclaimed Trevethik, as the last boat-load pushed off to the steamer's side. "I fear we have some heavy work in front of us."

I had received such repeated proofs of Trevethik's shrewdness that I was curious to learn in what light he regarded the scene we had just witnessed.

"Well, lieutenant," he remarked slowly, in answer to my question, "I may be wrong, but it seems to me that the colonel is at bay, and intends to cut a passage through the howling pack around him."

"But," I objected, "would not that be playing into the hands of our enemies? To gain possession of Granada is their one great desire; is it likely the colonel will make them a gift of it?"

"That is the obstacle which I cannot surmount," said Trevethik thoughtfully. "But we must do something; to remain here, now that the Costers are again in motion, is to court disaster. They will not need to fight; they can starve us into submission. Depend upon it that, by hook or by crook, the colonel will get out of Granada."

All that day the air was thick with rumours. In some mysterious manner the filibusters gained an inkling of the fact that a desperate undertaking had been resolved upon, though as yet none but a chosen few were acquainted with its real nature.

That night, however, the colonel called a meeting of the chief officers, to whom he expounded his plans. The room was full, and I noted with apprehension how serious were the countenances of all present. On the face of the chief

alone there were no traces of gloom or doubt; his features preserved their placid calmness, and he spoke in the quiet, even tones habitual to him.

"Gentlemen," he began, "we have reached a crisis in our fortunes which calls for prompt and vigorous action. You are aware that General Belloso's army has lately received considerable reinforcements, and I learn from a trustworthy source that he has now fully five thousand men under his command. This in itself would be of comparatively little importance, were it not for the fact that the Costa Ricans have again crossed the frontier. There, gentlemen, is the danger which menaces us. Should they seize and hold the transit road, they will be enabled effectually to cut off our supplies. I will not disguise from you that this is a grave and imminent danger. In our present position we can do nothing. It is utterly impossible to hold Granada and at the same time to preserve our ascendency over the transit road. The latter is essential, and therefore Granada must be evacuated."

A buzz of excitement ran round the room, but it quickly subsided as he proceeded:—"Here we are at once confronted by another difficulty. To place Granada in the hands of the allied army would be unwise and impolitic. It would afford our enemies, not only a material advantage, but a moral encouragement, which they would doubtless turn to good account. After mature consideration I have, though with deep reluctance, come to the conclusion that the city must be destroyed. This task I have entrusted to Brigadier-General Henningsen. Definite instructions will

be issued in the morning; meanwhile I trust you will regard this as a private communication."

"A desperate disease, the physicians inform us, requires a desperate remedy," mused Captain Boland, as we wended our way back to our quarters, "but I must honestly confess I have no liking for the prescription."

"It is horrible to contemplate," I exclaimed hotly, pausing in my walk to glance at the doomed city.

"Still," said Boland meditatively, "the colonel was right. We must go out, and we cannot afford to let the others take possession of it. Yet it seems a thousand pities. But after all," with a sudden briskness, "we are wasting our sentiment. The town must go anyhow; it is only a question of time. If we remained and stood a siege, the Serviles would destroy it; so practically it matters very little."

But although the gallant captain was thus easily reconciled to the impending destruction of the beautiful city, I could not for my part find much consolation in his ingenious argument. I was indeed thoroughly and entirely miserable, my one hope being that I should not personally be required to take part in the coming tragedy.

Bidding adieu to the philosophic captain, who by this time had recovered his equanimity, I sought my room, to endeavour if possible to obtain a few hours' rest. I had begun to undress, when I noticed with feelings of mingled surprise and alarm a sealed letter lying at the head of the bed. Picking it up hastily I examined the address, and found, as I had half suspected, that it was directed in Luis Pacheco's handwriting to Lieutenant Foster.

The communication was very brief, and the writing bore signs of extreme haste.

"Dear Colin," my friend wrote, "the storm is about to burst, and will overwhelm you. You have made a gallant struggle, but fate has decided adversely, and you must accept the inevitable. I do not ask you to effect your own safety by deserting a falling cause. Such a request, I well know, would prove revolting to your sense of honour. But one thing I do most earnestly beg. I have enclosed in this letter a safeguard signed by General Belloso. Should the time arrive, as seems more than probable, when you are reduced to extremities, do not, I implore you for all our sakes, hesitate to make use of this document. There can be nothing dishonourable in accepting your life at the hands of a victorious foe. We are all well. Miguel is rapidly recovering his lost strength, and our chief sorrow now is for your hazardous position. God grant that in a short time we may be able to assure ourselves of your safety.—Your true friend, LUIS PACHECO."

My first sensation after reading this epistle was one of gratification at this further proof of continued kindness on the part of my friends. Still dwelling fondly upon the thought of their devotion, I stowed the letter with its remarkable enclosure safely away, and got into bed.

Suddenly, however, a question, which made me the more anxious the more I tried to answer it, flashed across my mind. How had Luis Pacheco's messenger contrived to steal unperceived right into the very heart of our position? That he had come secretly I augured from his not having

waited to see me; and yet so well guarded was every mode of ingress and egress that I failed to account for his successful evasion of the sentries.

In itself the matter was a simple one; the importance lay in the fact that if my friend's servant could find an unguarded entry into the town, so could Belloso's soldiers. For a long time I lay turning it over in my mind without gaining much satisfaction, and finally promising myself that I would inquire closely into it at the first opportunity, I fell asleep.

I had just breakfasted the next morning, when the colonel's orderly brought me word to report myself at once at headquarters.

The colonel was alone in his room, and his face wore an expression of gravity very rarely seen there. "Colin," he said, with an unusual show of feeling, "I wished to say a word to you before we part company. It is just possible that the chance may not occur again."

"Part company, sir!" I echoed in amazement. "I do not understand."

His face lighted with a good-humoured smile. "Of course," he said, "it may be only for a few hours; still our condition is so desperate, one cannot calculate with certainty upon anything. This evening, as you know, I am leaving the town; you will remain behind with the brigadier-general. Should anything unforeseen happen to prevent our reunion, I wish you to remember that your conduct has given me the greatest satisfaction. Most especially I would have you know I am not ungrateful for what you did at Rivas."

I pressed his hand; my emotion would hardly allow me to speak. Finally I managed to assure him of my undiminished devotion to his person, and to thank him for his many acts of kindness.

"There is one other matter," he continued. "If circumstances prove too strong for me—and at present my star seems overshadowed—do not forget there are good friends in San Francisco who will not desert you. And so, my boy, farewell, perhaps for ever!"

I bade him adieu with a sorrowful heart, and went out sadly to report myself to Brigadier-General Henningsen.

All through the short day the preparations went swiftly on. Every one, from the colonel down to the youngest drummer-boy, worked with a will, until when evening arrived nothing remained to be done. Silently we who were left behind took leave of our comrades, and as the last file disappeared a spirit of sadness seemed to shroud us in its gloomy wings.

For our little band, indeed, the danger had become grave and pressing. Shorn of the major portion of our strength, our safety depended upon our own unaided efforts. We were hemmed in by a populace secretly hostile, who only awaited a chance of success to turn fiercely against us. Outside, how close we knew not then, lay a Servile army, headed by a daring and resolute leader, who would most certainly fight to the death in order to save his beloved city from destruction.

Very soon I perceived we were to be confronted with a graver peril still. Freed from the restraint that Walker's

iron sway had always produced, a number of the filibusters now abandoned themselves to every sort of licence, and even before the work of demolition had begun were lying drunk in the streets, or arm in arm were reeling to and fro, shouting, swearing, and singing snatches of wild songs.

"Lieutenant Foster," the brigadier-general said, "take a dozen steady men and whip those rascals up. Unless I am greatly deceived, we shall soon stand in need of all our muster."

"Yes," exclaimed Trevethik to me, as we filed off, "those drunken beasts will cost us our lives yet. The first tongue of fire will light the Serviles into the city, and what can a hundred men do against five thousand?"

By dint of alternate persuasion and threatening, with soft words or lusty blows as seemed most expedient, we had succeeded in collecting a portion of the laggards, when a loud shout announced that Henningsen had begun his work.

Up they sprang into the air, long fiery snakes, one, two, a dozen, leaping and twisting, enfolding each other, separating, darting their forked tongues hither and thither hungrily in search of prey, and growing by what they fed upon. It was a magnificent sight, though appalling, and for a moment we paused to contemplate the spectacle. Even the intoxicated wretches lying in the roadway were partially sobered, and tried to stagger to their feet.

"Come, boys," I cried, making the most of the opportunity, "we must not linger here. There is plenty of work to be done, and the Serviles may be upon us at any minute."

"Right ye are, cap'en," hiccoughed a tall fellow, who was leaning against the wall of a house. "They won't stay long, you take your davy," flourishing his revolvers.

We stood facing each other, my back being to the wall of the opposite house. Just as he finished speaking there came the sound of a pistol-shot, a bullet whizzed past my ear, and Red Dick, as the man was commonly called, threw up his arms with a shriek.

"That shot was meant for you, sir," said Trevethik; "it came from there," pointing to one of the houses; and while in the act of turning my head to look, another bullet ploughed through my slouched hat.

"This is too near to be pleasant, Phil," I said. "Come, my lads, we must have the scoundrel out of that."

A mocking laugh floated down to us from the grated window opening on to the balcony, and for a fleeting instant I caught sight of a now familiar face.

"It is Don Garcia, Philip," I cried, and a dozen bullets flattened themselves simultaneously against the iron bars.

The rascal, however, remained unhurt. "Good-bye, Señor Foster," he called tauntingly. "Your men will have need to fire better than that shortly."

Waving his hand as he gave utterance to this sarcasm, he sprang back, and disappeared, while all the filibusters who were sober enough to do so darted in pursuit.

Speedy as was the rush, we were too late; Don Garcia had made good his escape, nor could we discover the slightest trace of him.

But the sullen murmurs of the men at finding them-

selves balked of their prey suddenly gave place to a wild cry of alarm, and truly the sight which met my gaze from the grated window was not calculated to restore one's confidence.

Down the narrow street poured impetuously a living torrent, with the Servile general at its head. Close at his heels rushed his swarthy followers, their eyes flashing with a fierce rage at the sight of their favourite city a prey to the flames; for Henningsen, aided by his scanty force, was performing his task effectually. One glance convinced me that the wretched filibusters who had remained in the street were doomed; nothing short of a miracle could save them. Above the sharp savage yells of the foe rose the cry of our hapless comrades, "The Serviles! the Serviles!"

Instinctively I glanced at Trevethik, but he shook his head mournfully. "It would be madness," he muttered, divining my intention. "What could our little handful do against a host like that?"

Even as he spoke the end came. Some of the filibusters never once moved; they lay like logs, and the maddened Serviles cut them to pieces with fiendish glee. A few, however, planted themselves with their backs to the wall, and poured in one deadly volley before they were surrounded. Grim, stern-eyed men were they, who had looked death too often in the face to flinch now, and with a last "Hurrah" they dropped their empty rifles, and, knife in hand, sprang savagely at the foe.

The whole series of events had been enacted with such startling rapidity that even had our numbers been greater

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I turned and looked at her (p. 309)

we could have effected no good; but the sight of this last act in the terrible drama sent a thrill of deep emotion through us.

"Begorra," exclaimed the Irishman, in a tone of the most intense excitement, "sure it's Dennis Brogan that can't stand that!" and before any one could prevent him he levelled his rifle and fired into the throng.

The proceeding was of course an act of sheer madness, since it directed the attention of the Serviles to ourselves; but it could not be undone, and nothing remained but to make the best of it.

"Steady, boys," I cried, for the Irishman's shot had acted like magic, and every one was crowding to place the muzzle of his rifle between the bars; "aim low, and fire into the thickest part; you cannot miss."

When the noise of the report died away, I continued, "Trevethik, take a couple of men to the rear of the house, and see if we can escape; they are bringing up their artillery."

"Shoot the men at the guns!" shouted Brogan excitedly. "Ah, Jim, that was a nate shot," as one of the carriage horses rolled over. "Now another; here they come, the naygurs!"

Twice we stopped the mad rush of the angry crowd, but the third time I knew would be fatal; they would sweep over us like the waves of a storm-tossed ocean over a doomed bark.

Just then I heard Trevethik's voice. "Back, Mr. Foster, back, while there is yet time; we have not a second to spare."

For the last time we took aim, and fired a telling volley; then following Trevethik's lead, we darted to the rear of the building, scrambled to the top of a high wall, and dropped into a narrow court, as a triumphant yell announced that the Serviles had stormed the house.

Forming the men into a small but compact body, I pushed them rapidly to the head of the court, fearful lest the enemy should entrap us in that awkward position. Luckily for our present safety, however, General Belloso had a weightier matter on hand than the tedious, and perhaps fruitless, pursuit of a scanty detachment like mine; so leaving a small number to search the houses, he pushed on swiftly with the main body.

"He is making straight for the plaza, Mr. Foster," said Trevethik. "He will catch our men unawares."

I paused a moment to reflect. Amidst the din and uproar, the shrieks of the Granadinos, the crash of falling timbers, the booming of the cannon, the incessant rattle of musketry, and the intermittent explosions, it was almost certain that Henningsen would remain ignorant of the approach of the Serviles until they were upon him. In that case it was likely to go hard with our comrades, who were scattered here and there in small bands, carrying on systematically their work of destruction.

To reach the plaza before the Serviles, and thus give warning of their approach, could only be accomplished by breaking right through the head of their force, and this I deemed wellnigh hopeless. Still it must be attempted. A few yards further on, a small side street debouched into the

main road. Could we reach and traverse it before Belloso passed the entrance, the rest would be comparatively easy; but I feared it was not possible.

However, we could try; and rapidly explaining my ideas, I hurried the men forward at their utmost speed. Gaining the street, we peered anxiously toward the other end. So far fortune favoured us—the enemy were not in sight.

"Steady, boys!" I said quietly. "Keep your ranks; and should there be a collision, give them a volley from your revolvers, and finish with the knife. Once through, every man for himself, and twenty dollars to the one who first reaches the brigadier. Hush! no cheering."

Up the narrow street we went with a swing, step for step. A half, three-quarters of the distance was accomplished, when we heard the clatter of horses' feet, and the Servile general, followed by his staff, dashed across the head of the passage.

So intent were they upon their immediate purpose, that they did not give us a glance. Then came the advance-guard; and uttering a wild cry we went at them. Reserving our fire until we stood almost face to face, we poured in a crashing volley, and seizing our knives, cut our way through. The suddenness of the attack startled them. Just for a brief instant they lost their balance, and the momentary indecision proved our salvation.

"Spread out, men," I cried, as we burst our way through the front rank; "shoot the horses, and let every shot tell!"

The filibusters answered with a cheer, and scattered

right and left. Belloso's staff suddenly wheeled to discover the cause of the commotion; but a dozen bullets sped on their way, and five or six of the steeds rolled over. Two or three more, hit, but not fatally, galloped madly this way and that, utterly beyond control.

On we dashed, facing round now and again to deliver a volley when one of the riders came too near; then forward, panting, nearly breathless, with every muscle strained. Already a dozen horses had gone down, and we had not escaped scathless. Two men had been savagely speared, most of the others were hit; but we never slackened the pace until the plaza appeared in sight. Then raising our voices together we shouted with all our remaining strength, "The Serviles! the Serviles are upon us!'

At our heels rode the horsemen. Behind them we could hear the heavy tramp of the infantry and the rattle of the gun-carriages; but for the moment we were safe.

"The brigadier!" I shouted; "tell the general the Serviles are in the plaza—five thousand strong."

Then my limbs tottered under me; a cloudy mist gathered before my eyes; a sharp stabbing pain shot through my side, as if something had given way, and I fell headlong. I recognized Brogan's voice telling some one to lift my head, experienced the sensation of being raised from the ground, and then all was a blank.

CHAPTER XX.

A DEATH-TRAP.

WHEN I recovered consciousness, it was to gaze with a feeling of wonder at the place in which I found myself.

It was simply a small hut with mud-built walls, and had evidently been recently converted into a kind of hospital. Numerous planks supported on trestles were placed round the room, and on each of these primitive bedsteads lay a wounded soldier. The number of disabled men, however, far exceeded the accommodation, and those brought in last had been wrapped in blankets and laid on the floor.

I shivered violently as my eyes wandered round the nauseous apartment, and stopped my ears in the endeavour to keep out the terrible groans and heartrending cries of pain which went up from one and another of the beds. Dark pools of blood stained the ground, and through the dim half-light I could just discern bandaged heads and limbs and faces soaked in the same dark-coloured fluid.

Two or three men with rolled-up sleeves glided noiselessly from bed to bed, now whispering words of comfort and cheer, now administering some soothing potion, and

once or twice standing silently with bowed heads before some shapeless object, the stillness and rigidity of which assured them that here at least could be no question of their healing power.

Mingled with the moans and piercing shrieks, there rose up ever in ceaseless plaint the cry for water. "Water, doctor, water! Give me a drink; my mouth is parched, my throat is burning! Water, doctor; for God's sake give me water! I am on fire!"

Thus it went on with tireless repetition from all parts of the room. An unquenchable thirst, burning and insatiable, consumed them, ate them up, turned the very blood to fire in their veins; while ever the dark figures passed to and fro on their errand of love and mercy.

I closed my eyes wearily, and endeavoured to collect my thoughts. Where was I? what had happened? By slow degrees I gathered up the knotty and tangled skein of my memory, and set patiently to work to unravel the interlaced threads. Little by little I straightened them out, untying a knot here and there, until the past became clear. I remembered Don Garcia and the empty house, Brogan's shot, the fight with the Serviles, and the fearful race into the plaza.

Had we succeeded in our object? I wondered; and with a swift glance around these human shambles, I concluded sorrowfully that our effort had been made in vain. But why was I here? Had I been wounded? I could not recollect. With a nervous dread I passed my hands over my body. I felt my legs, my head. I looked eagerly

at the blanket—there were no traces of blood; but my frame ached in every joint.

Just as I arrived at the conclusion that nothing serious had happened to me, one of the surgeons paused before the next bed. He stooped down, and then signalled silently to a colleague, who instantly came across.

"Poor Boland has gone to his account," he whispered. "Do you remember our supper on the night before Walker marched out?"

"Ah, what spirits he was in, to be sure! How he laughed and jested! I can fancy him singing that last song now, and hear his toast as we broke up. Well, we must put another poor fellow in his place; it will matter nothing to him now where he lies."

Raising myself on my elbow, I asked, "Is that Captain Boland?" and Dr. Sparrow turned his head in my direction.

"Yes," he replied; "poor Boland has fought his last fight under the Lone Star flag, and he is only one of many during the last two days. But I'm glad, lieutenant, to find you are awake. Truth to tell, I thought you were bound on the same journey."

"But what is the matter? I cannot find that I am wounded."

"No; that was just the mischief. If we could have found the passage of a bullet, or a sword-thrust anywhere, we should have known how to have acted. But you simply collapsed—went down 'all of a heap,' Brogan said. He and Trevethik brought you here, and here you have remained. Let me feel your pulse. Ah, quite normal.

Now undo your shirt," and resting a small instrument on my chest, he applied his ear to the other end. "Nothing wrong that I can detect," he said thoughtfully. "Draw in a deep breath. Now again. That's better. Heart beats regularly enough; lungs safe. How do you feel?"

"Well, I am really ashamed to confess it, but my one great sensation is that of hunger. I am famishing. Were you to prescribe a good square meal, and see the medicine properly administered, you would soon have one patient the less on your hands."

Dr. Sparrow smiled. "We will try its effect," he said pleasantly. "I will get you a basin of beef-tea to begin with."

My statement was by no means an exaggeration. I was truly ravenous; and when my friend returned with a large basin of beef-tea, I devoured it greedily. I thought the doctor watched me with rather an amused expression on his face, and as I laid down the empty vessel with a deep sigh of satisfaction, he asked me how I had enjoyed it.

"Famously," I replied; "it was delicious; but it seemed to possess rather a peculiar flavour."

"Yes, the flavour, I grant, is a trifle strong; still, for beef-tea made from horse-flesh, I really think it does deserve your commendation. Do not look so surprised. Here is Stringer bringing a steak from the same animal; and being at present on hospital rations, I have allowed you a little bread. Make the most of it; it is probably the last you will taste for some time. But now I must

leave you, my services are required elsewhere; we are just going to take off a poor fellow's leg." And at Stringer's approach with the juicy steak, the surgeon took his departure.

Although rather averse to the experiment of dining upon horse-flesh, the pangs of hunger were still so keen that I overcame my disgust and fell to manfully. It must be confessed that, apart from sentiment, I found little of which to complain, and I was really sorry when the meal came to an end.

I had calculated upon rising at the conclusion of my repast, but as I handed Stringer the empty plate, a drowsy fit seized me, and lying down on the hard bed, I fell asleep.

Suddenly the sound of heavy firing close at hand penetrated my slumbers, and I rose with a start. My clothes were rolled in a bundle at the head of the bed; and dressing slowly, for I was still very weak and sore, I picked my way between the wounded soldiers to the door. As I reached it, Dr. Sparrow entered.

"Well, lieutenant," he said heartily, "so you have taken your discharge. Rather imprudent, I think. But it is not for me to grumble; there are plenty of candidates for the vacant bed, and every man who can hold a musket is badly needed at present."

He passed in, and for a few minutes I stood and stared around in a sort of stupefaction. The hut against which I leaned was the end one of a series stretching away to my left, and these huts, I knew, were situated on the outskirts

of the town, between Granada and the lake. To my right towered what appeared in the darkness to be a high wall, which I did not remember having seen before. Dotted round in a circle were the watch-fires, burning with a dull, red glare, and every now and then I saw the magnified shadows of the vigilant sentries. The noise of the firing had died away. All was comparatively still; nothing broke the silence of the night but the murmur of the men's voices.

Presently from the direction of the wall came a little group. At the head walked a tall man, who could be no other than Henningsen; and drawing myself up I saluted.

"Lieutenant Foster, by all that's wonderful!" he exclaimed in surprise. "Has Dr. Sparrow turned you out?"

"No," I replied laughingly; "my present position is the result of a bargain. I have bartered my sick-room privileges for a bowl of soup, and—what shall I call it? it can scarcely be termed beef-steak."

"Call it rump-steak; it was very likely off the rump," chimed in another, and the little party laughed.

"If your appetite still annoys you, come and sup with us," said the brigadier cordially; and desirous of learning what had happened, I accepted the invitation gladly.

Passing into the light, I noticed with surprise that my brother officers were begrimed with smoke and powder, and presented a very worn and harassed appearance.

In Henningsen's tent a meal had been hastily spread, and in spite of the previous repast, I felt quite prepared to treat it with justice.

"By the way, Foster," exclaimed Henningsen, cutting off a piece of steak more tough than tender, "you did not give me time to thank you the other day. It was a plucky deed—we have heard all about it from Trevethik—and there is little doubt a great many of us owe our lives to the daring of your men."

My face flushed with pleasure at this speech, for there are very few of us indifferent to the praise of our superiors.

"Judging by the present state of things," I made answer, "I fear that, after all, the warning came too late."

"To a certain extent you are correct, but it prevented us from being cut down in detached groups. However, the beggars succeeded in getting possession of the Church of the Guadalupe, which they retained for two days. You will find many of the old familiar faces absent, for we have suffered terribly."

During the progress of the meal I learned in greater detail from one and another what had occurred. Before Belloso could form his men in position, the filibusters, alarmed by our shouts and cries, swarmed up to ascertain the cause, and realizing their imminent peril had quietly taken the position which Henningsen had previously assigned to them.

Foiled thus far in his intended enterprise, the Servile leader promptly and expeditiously threw his men into the Church of the Guadalupe, immediately beginning his preparations for the assault which he foresaw the filibusters would be compelled to make.

In this his military instinct did not deceive him. Hen-

ningsen at once recognized that, at whatever cost, the Serviles must be driven forth. For two days and nights the furious struggle raged. Again and again the filibusters, under cover of their artillery, rushed to the attack, only to be repulsed and hurled back on each occasion by the heavy fire and overwhelming numbers of the Serviles.

These last, maddened by the partial destruction of their favourite city, fought with desperate valour, neither giving nor expecting quarter. No danger was too great to be met; they fought with a dogged stubbornness and inflexible will, dealing out terrible slaughter. In vain Henningsen and his officers placed themselves in the front rank; in vain Captain Swingle, who was in command of the artillery, plied his guns with deadly effect: for eight-and-forty hours the Serviles withstood the assault; and when at length they were driven out, the damage they had inflicted upon the filibusters was enormous.

Transforming the re-captured church into a temporary hospital, Henningsen collected the remnant of his force, and called a council of the surviving officers. The victory just gained did not blind them to the gravity of their position. The Serviles, although defeated, had not been routed, and were even then preparing, by means of a swift flank movement, to hem the victors in. It would, of course, have been perfectly feasible, by abandoning the wounded, to have cut a passage through to the lake; but this plan, though patent to all, was not even hinted at.

"It is quite plain, gentlemen," Henningsen said at the close of the discussion, "that our progress will be opposed

by a stubborn resistance. My proposition is this:—Let us make the row of adobe huts at the west of the town our base of operations. Encumbered with our wounded, we dare not meet the enemy in the open; it would be, not a fight, but a massacre. But we can form these huts into a hospital, and a few hours' labour will suffice to throw up a fairly defensive earthwork, behind which the Serviles will not venture. Then, using the heavy guns to clear the ground, we can advance step by step, protecting ourselves by earthworks, till we are near enough to make a dash for the coast."

The brigadier's scheme had been unanimously agreed upon, and was even then in course of operation.

But Belloso was not in the humour thus to be balked of his prey. Smarting under his heavy losses, he resolved that the filibusters should yet pay dearly for their recent success.

Humanly speaking, we were completely at his mercy. With a burning town and a hostile populace behind us, unable to turn, either to the right hand or the left, our sole hope of escape lay in reaching the lake.

This he determined to render impossible. Selecting a spot about half-way between the huts and the lake, favourable to the accomplishment of his design, he threw up a series of earthworks similar to our own, and so strengthened them with his artillery as to make the position well-nigh impregnable.

Now began for us a most wretched and miserable time. With each hour the aspect became gloomier and the out-

look less cheering. Surrounded by savage and vindictive foes, hemmed in on all sides, we had scarcely a moment's rest.

All day long, and often far through the night, came the crash of the great guns, and the iron messengers of death hurtled through the smoke-laden air right into our midst. As if divining how greatly we stood in need of rest, the enemy, too, were for ever threatening us with false attacks, which, had we been unprepared, could easily have been converted into real ones.

Nor did the Serviles constitute our only danger. As if eager to aid in the work of destruction, those fell diseases, cholera and typhus fever, made their appearance, attacking with a deadly virulence the men who had been left temporarily in the Church of the Guadalupe.

Our provisions too were of the most meagre proportions and unpalatable description. For days we lived on mule and horse flesh, knowing well that a time must soon arrive when even these would fail us. Look where we might, death, in its most hideous forms, stared us in the face. Famine, disease, and the sword encompassed us, stretching out their fleshless arms to fold us in a close embrace.

Under these circumstances it was not perhaps a matter for much surprise that the men's spirits sank below zero. Hitherto they had been buoyed up by the hope of escape or relief; but now each morning narrowed their horizon, bringing them face to face with the sober truth in all its naked ugliness. They had endured much, these men, and thus far had borne their misfortunes with heroic constancy.

But now a change came over them. They went about their work with black looks and sullen brows; they became moody and discontented, sometimes even giving vent to an angry exclamation.

One night, after many hours of constant and unremitting labour, I wrapped my cloak wearily around me and lay down by the side of a fire to snatch an hour's sleep. My eyes were heavy with long-enforced wakefulness, and directly my head touched the ground they closed without an effort.

But it was fated that I was not to sleep just yet. A hand was laid lightly on my face, and I heard Trevethik whisper, "Mr. Foster, rouse yourself; I must speak with you."

Next to Walker, perhaps even before him, Trevethik was my greatest friend; but at that moment I cordially wished he had been a thousand miles away. However, there was no help for it, so turning over, I said, "Make it short, Phil—there's a good fellow; I'm dead-beat."

"Very sorry to disturb you, sir," he answered grimly, "but you will be wide awake enough in a minute, I'll warrant. Do you know the men are on the verge of mutiny?"

Trevethik's estimate was correct; his news wakened me thoroughly.

"Go on, Phil," I exclaimed, eagerly excited, but keeping my voice to a whisper; "tell me all about it."

"Well, it's like this," he began. "You know what we have been through during the last fortnight. You've had your share of it, and so have I, too, for that matter; and we're not a bit nearer to getting out than on the day when

Belloso's niggers captured the church. According to the men's notions we are further away, and every day makes their plight more desperate. Even now we do not number more than a hundred and sixty all told. Belloso keeps strengthening his position; the daily rations are rapidly fining down to vanishing point, and what is to happen then? The men say they are in a death-trap—which is true enough—and that by remaining here they will all either be starved or massacred."

"Yes," I assented, wondering what would come next; "and how do they propose to solve the difficulty?"

"By making a bold dash, and cutting their way through at the sword's point to the lake."

"But that is sheer madness; how do they intend to get the wounded through? It cannot be done, Philip."

"No," he said, very slowly, "not in that way; but they do not intend to burden themselves with those who cannot fight. They argue in this manner:—The wounded are doomed anyhow, whether the rest stay or go. In a few days the provisions will be exhausted, and then we must all die, either by famine or at the hands of the Serviles. At present there is, for a few, a bare chance of escape, then there will be none; and looked at from that point of view, the reasoning, you must admit, is tolerably shrewd."

I started to my feet in dismay. "Philip!" I cried, "surely you—but no, old friend, I will not insult you. Forgive the base suspicion; it was only the half-doubt of a moment."

The honest fellow gripped my proffered hand, and his

face lit up with a smile. "No, Mr. Foster; Phil Trevethik has not been trained to run away. As long as one of my comrades draws breath in this wretched hole, you will find me fighting under the Lone Star flag. For Dennis, too, I can answer, and at least a score more. But you had better see the brigadier at once," and with a farewell pressure, he stole cautiously away.

Henningsen listened to my story without betraying any signs of astonishment. "Poor beggars!" he muttered. "They're right enough, Foster; as far as I can see, we are all going to die like rats in a trap. But at least we'll die without disgracing the old flag. That Trevethik is a trusty fellow; so is his chum Brogan; we can depend upon them. Seek them out and get a list of all the others likely to remain true to us."

There was no indecision about Henningsen; he took his measures as promptly and vigorously as Walker himself could have done. One by one, so as not to excite suspicion, the officers were called up, and to each was explained the new gravity of the situation. Trevethik and Brogan were, meanwhile, rapidly passing round the little force, sounding those likely to remain loyal; while Captain Swingle, who could place implicit confidence in his men, was industriously charging his guns with grape-shot, and making every needful preparation to face the coming storm.

At the first streak of dawn the bugle-notes rang out, and the whole company of filibusters, with the exception of the corps of artillery, drew up in parade order. The

Serviles had not yet opened their morning salute, and as Henningsen stepped out a dead silence fell on the ranks.

He was a brave, dashing-looking man. In the prime of life, tall, with a pleasant yet firm face, straight as a dart, a magnificent athlete, he was the *beau ideal* of a soldier. Still comparatively young, he had already on many a hard-fought field conclusively proved both his valour and his genius for war. Amidst Russian snows, in Austrian forests, and on the mountain-sides of sunny Spain, he had fearlessly faced death a hundred times. To us he had come when we were in direst straits, and the reputation he had brought with him had never been tarnished. From his first coming he had acquired an immense popularity amongst the grim, scarred veterans of the north; but we, who had had opportunities to watch him closely, knew full well that the velvet glove concealed an iron hand. The time had arrived when it became necessary to use it, and we had no fear as to the result.

He advanced eagerly; his eyes flashed; the excitement under which he laboured was evident in his voice, but he spoke with a ring of resolute determination.

"Now, lads," he began, "I'm not much of a talker, but I'm going to open this morning's work with a little speech. There is nothing you do not already know, but perhaps it's as well that I should state publicly just how we are fixed. We have enough food to keep us alive for another four days, and then, if help does not come from the colonel, we are all going to die together."

There was a low, ominous murmur from a section of the ranks, but it was swallowed up in his next words.

"Ah!" he said with an outburst of scorn, "I am coming to that. A whisper has reached me that there are a few men here, calling themselves Americans, so far lost to all sense of manhood that they have actually contemplated forcing their way through the Servile army to the lake. What about their sick and wounded comrades? What about the men who have fought day after day at our side, and who now lie at death's door? They are to perish. They are to lie here, helpless and alone, to be cut into pieces by the Servile swords. Bah! the thought makes my blood boil. I fancied I was a leader of *men*—men, not curs. Have we journeyed so many miles, have we triumphed in so many battles, in order to bring disgrace on the Lone Star flag at last? No! I will not believe it. You have been led away by the fears of some coward eager to save his own pitiful carcass at the expense of his fellows. But the mad fit has passed; your faces tell me so. For the next few days we are a band of brothers, each ready to lay down his life for the common good, each eager to retain unsullied the honour of our flag."

Whether influenced by his heroic bravery or by the knowledge that the first mutinous act would be met by a discharge of grape-shot, I do not know, but the filibusters responded to his speech with a loud cheer, and vowed they would stand by him to the end.

Now that our destruction seemed not only certain but imminent, Henningsen resolved to endeavour to acquaint Walker

with our desperate state. This in itself was an undertaking attended with the greatest danger, since it necessitated the messenger's passing through the heart of the enemy's camp.

Amongst our motley company was a youth who had been christened by the filibusters Kanaka John. He was a native of the Sandwich Islands, and to him was entrusted the perilous mission. Under cover of the dark night, he crept out unperceived from our intrenchments, leaving us in a state of mingled hope and fear. Upon his successful evasion of the Servile sentries depended our sole chance of escape, and many a silent prayer was breathed for his safety as he slipped cautiously away.

The suspense of the next few hours was simply intolerable. We performed our duties mechanically, for all the time our ears were eagerly strained, waiting to catch the sound of distant firing.

I could not help admiring the implicit confidence which the filibusters placed in the willingness and ability of Walker to aid them. If Kanaka John had got through, then their safety was assured. They did not pause to reason; they took no notice of the fearful obstacles which our comrades must overcome in order that we might be rescued; their only anxiety was for the fate of the dusky messenger.

At last it came, the sound for which we had waited so impatiently, and the men, leaping to the top of the embankment, waved their hats and gave vent to a loud "Hurrah!" As yet we could see naught of our deliverers, but the crack of their rifles reached us, and we saw the

Serviles in wild commotion hurrying their guns to another part of the field.

"He is making a detour to avoid their intrenchments," exclaimed Henningsen joyfully. "He will come in at our rear. Rogers, ask Captain Swingle for a couple of light guns, and take fifty men; a little help may prove opportune. Lieutenant Foster will go with you. Remember, lads, you are fighting, not for victory, but for all our lives."

Compared with the terrific struggle now taking place, our former battles had been child's play. Rendered furious by the fear that after all we should slip through their hands, the Serviles fought with the savage ferocity of wild beasts. Led by their officers, they threw themselves bodily on the advancing filibusters, as if to crush them by sheer weight of numbers. The carnage was frightful, but they seemed absolutely reckless of life; whole lines were swept away, only to be instantly replaced by fresh bodies of troops, who advanced with unabated ardour. But, in spite of their valour and numbers, the filibusters gained way. Foot by foot they pressed steadily onward, until the Serviles, cowed and dispirited, gave ground, and our comrades with one grand rush swept them backwards. Then, succeeding to the rattle of musketry and the booming of the cannon, a mighty shout of joy and triumph rose on the air—we were saved.

The leader of the reinforcements was Colonel Watters, and as he rode down to meet Henningsen, the remnant of that general's command greeted him with a volley of ringing cheers.

But there was little time for delay. Much yet remained to be done, and the Serviles, though momentarily repulsed, were far from being conquered.

Our first care was for the wounded, and while one portion of the filibusters conveyed them carefully and tenderly to the shore, where Walker waited with a steamer, the remainder set about finishing the destruction of the city.

This time there was no interruption, and in a brief space Granada, the pride of the Serviles, was a heap of ruins. Mighty explosions followed one another in rapid succession, for Henningsen had large supplies of ammunition, and was unsparing in his use of it. Dense volumes of smoke obscured the view; but from a distance we could hear the crash of the falling buildings, and ever and anon a huge mass of flame would pierce its way upward, lighting the sombre canopy with a lurid glow.

The spectacle saddened me as, leaning on Trevethik's arm, for I was weary and faint, I looked back at what had once been Granada.

"It is the beginning of the end," remarked that worthy fellow pensively. "With the fall of Granada will fall the fortunes of the filibusters;" and some hidden instinct told me his prophecy was true.

Dennis had been left behind with Henningsen, but we had no fears for his safety; we knew the Serviles would not dare to attack our comrades so soon after the terrible fight. By the time we had seen to the comfort of the wounded the work was accomplished; the stately city was a thing of the past.

CHAPTER XXI.

HEMMED IN.

NOW that the first part of his plan had been successfully accomplished, Walker lost no time in proceeding to Rivas, the possession of which would give him the command of the transit road. Upon him, to all outward seeming, our recent heavy losses and present perilous position produced no effect; his features were as calm and unruffled as ever.

A few others shared his confidence; but amongst the great majority of the filibusters I gathered there was but one opinion—that henceforth our cause was doomed. And, indeed, I myself could come to no other conclusion. Granada had fallen. The Leonese were scattered, broken in spirit, and impotent for good or ill. The Serviles, animated by a bitter and savage spirit of enmity, were scarcely two days' march from Rivas; the north of the country was in the hands of a horde of Hondurans, Guatemalans, and San Salvadorians; the Costa Ricans, eager to avenge their former defeats, were swarming over the southern frontier; and against them all what had we to oppose?

I gazed long and earnestly at our little company, and

wondered how many would ever again leave the place to which we were now bound.

What a number of associations clustered around it! There I had first drawn my sword in real fighting; was it destined that I should sheathe it there? Humanly speaking, Rivas appeared likely to be the grave of our hopes; for how many of us would it prove the literal grave?

It wanted about ten days to Christmas when we disembarked from the vessel and entered the town.

"Well, Foster," exclaimed Henningsen gaily, as we leaped on shore, "I wonder how much better we shall fare at Rivas than at Granada?"

"We will put a bold face on matters at all events," I replied cheerfully, turning to help in the removal of the sick men.

On the day succeeding our arrival, Colonel Walker called me into his room, and gave me a piece of information which was a matter for much surprise.

"Colin," he began, "do you remember a conversation we once had concerning your English relations?"

"Yes, sir; and I informed you they were total strangers to me."

"Just so; but something has happened since which may, and probably will, have a very important bearing upon your future career. Read that marked advertisement," and he pushed forward a torn copy of an old *San Francisco Herald.*

I took the paper eagerly and read:—"Foster. Any information concerning James Foster, or his son Colin,

supposed to have settled in California in 1849, will be thankfully received by Hunt and Phillips, Old Jewry Chambers, London, England."

"Rather odd, sir," I observed, laying the paper down with a puzzled air; "I cannot imagine what business Hunt and Phillips can possibly have with me."

The colonel smiled. "The puzzle is not an intricate one," he answered; "but, in order that there should be no mistake, I have communicated with the gentlemen, who are solicitors practising in London. Not knowing how the matter might end, I kept the negotiations to myself for fear of a disappointment, but now I can safely entrust you with the information. I presume you will have no difficulty in establishing your identity as the son of James Foster, once of Carfax, Yorkshire, England."

"None at all! I have kept all my father's papers intact."

"In that case my news is of a very pleasant character. You have but to present your proofs to Messrs. Hunt and Phillips to be placed in possession of a nice little property worth something like eight hundred a year."

My first feeling was that of intense gratitude to the man who, burdened with his own personal cares and anxiety, had yet found time to interest himself on my behalf. I attempted to thank him, but he checked me laughingly.

"Oh, no, nonsense," he said with a kindly smile; "you owe me no thanks. Had I not brought you into Nicaragua, you would have discovered it for yourself, and by this time

have been safely at home. That brings me to the serious part of our discussion. If you are to settle down in life as an English gentleman, it is necessary you should get away from here at once. At present there would be little difficulty; in a few weeks' time your departure may be impossible. No, do not interrupt me. You have followed my fortunes faithfully; you have had more than your share of danger and hardship; twice you have travelled to the very brink of the grave; you have established a reputation for bravery which none will gainsay; and now an opportunity occurs to retire upon your well-earned laurels."

Again I essayed to speak, and again he stopped me. "A moment longer," he said. "I wish you to reflect. Here we are cooped up in Rivas, abandoned by our allies, surrounded by a hostile force overwhelming in numbers. Now, speaking frankly, unless we shortly receive large reinforcements, I see no prospect of an early termination to the war. Henningsen's experiences in Granada will be repeated here on a larger scale. Famine, pestilence, and the sword will be busy amongst us, and you cannot reasonably expect that your good fortune will attend you to the end. Colin, my boy, believe me, the prospect of a nameless grave in Rivas but ill balances the life of ease and pleasure which awaits you in England."

"But I cannot leave you, sir," I cried earnestly; "honour alone forbids it. I should despise myself for ever were I to desert you at this critical point in your fortunes."

My answer appeared to move him deeply, and a full

minute elapsed before he said, "Think it over, my boy, and give me your final reply in the morning. I will not press you further; only remember, in my opinion there will be nothing dishonourable in your action, should you decide to resign your commission."

Left to myself, my thoughts turned towards Trevethik. What would he say? how would he advise me to act?

I trust it will not lower me in the estimation of my readers when I confess I longed to accept the colonel's offer. I was tired of the incessant fighting and bloodshed in which the last two years of my life had been passed, and the picture my imagination conjured up of a peaceful life in merry England attracted me with almost irresistible force.

But from my earliest childhood I had been trained to follow the path of duty, and in this particular instance I greatly feared that duty and inclination led in opposite directions. However, I sought out Trevethik, and told him the story simply and without comment.

He listened attentively, and at the conclusion said soberly, "It's a marvellous piece of good luck, Mr. Foster, and I'm right glad to hear of it; I trust you will live to enjoy it."

"Which you evidently think very doubtful," I rejoined.

"Well, Mr. Foster, since you ask me, I will tell you. We have cheated death more than once since coming into this country, but I reckon the last time will pay for all."

Presently I told him of the colonel's offer, and asked his advice.

"No," he replied, "I will not give advice; I will put a question to you instead. When you landed at Rivas the other day, with what intention was it?"

"To aid my comrades in their struggle against the Serviles."

"And with what object will you desert them?"

"Ah, old friend," I exclaimed, grasping his hand warmly, "you are right. One does not require advice in so plain a matter. My mind is made up; I will remain and do my duty, though I am very weary of it all, Philip."

"The end cannot be far off," he said, "and this time the crash will be final."

The next morning I informed the colonel of my decision. "I think you are wrong," he said; "but I honour you for your desire to do what you deem your duty."

For several days we were kept exceedingly busy, strengthening the old fortifications and erecting new ones. Every possible means of defence was taken advantage of—barricades were thrown up, the houses loop-holed, the guns placed in positions where they could effect the most damage—and then we sat down to wait.

The transit road, to keep command of which we had sacrificed Granada, was still ours, and across it came occasionally a few recruits from San Francisco. But the days passed into weeks, and still there was no sign of the strong contingent which we expected. If this fresh body of troops did not come soon, our position would be hopeless; and as the time slipped away without any tidings, the silence appeared ominous.

Meanwhile the allies, seven or eight thousand strong, hemmed us in more and more closely, though as yet they did not feel powerful enough to attack us in our stronghold. But the mere fact of their presence in the immediate neighbourhood did us incalculable mischief, since it stopped our chance of obtaining fresh supplies.

The spirits of the men began to droop; the more timid became disheartened; disease again attacked us, and the hospital was crowded with sick and dying soldiers.

To crown our misfortunes, a rumour, based on we knew not what foundation, began to circulate, that the Costa Ricans had seized the town of San Juan and the transit road, thus rendering it impossible for any fresh reinforcements to come to our aid. When the filibusters realized the importance of this news, the gloom which had overspread the camp increased in intensity, and that very night a dozen men stole away and deserted to the enemy.

The loss of these renegades would have affected us but little, for they were a worthless set, but, unluckily, desertion is contagious, and of this we were to receive ample proof. After this first defection, scarcely a day or night passed without a further thinning of our numbers; even the sentries left their posts and sought safety in the camp of the enemy.

About this time, too, the Costa Ricans pushed forward between two and three thousand men and took possession of the village of San Jorge, a short distance south of Rivas. Following the tactics which General Belloso had successfully pursued at Masaya, they put it into a thorough state of

defence, and then used it as their head-quarters, from which, with little danger to themselves, they could swoop down in overwhelming force upon our foragers.

One evening Dennis came to me with a look of comical distress on his usually merry features. "Liftinant," he said, producing a crumpled piece of paper, "would ye mind reading this and telling me what ye think of it? It's from Mooney, the dirty little baste; he's gone over to the niggers, bad cess to him; the cooking didn't suit him at this establishment."

I looked at the note with some little interest. It was fairly well written, contained very few words, and bore no signature, but Dennis was fully satisfied that Mooney had written it.

"If you wish to do your officer-friend ['that's you, sir,' Dennis interpolated as I read it aloud] a good turn, meet me to-night at twelve o'clock under the third tree to the north of your last outpost, at the east end of the camp."

"How did you get possession of this?" I asked.

The Irishman looked at me with a merry twinkle. "Well, Mr. Foster," he said, "that's a question one needn't be too curious about; but it came from Mooney, safe enough."

"And what do you propose doing?"

"Meet him, of course. You wouldn't have me let the gintleman take his walk for nothing!"

"Very good, Dennis. Trevethik and I will come along; we may be useful. Knock me up when you are ready; O'Neill is doing the rounds to-night."

The safe and easy passage of the renegade's note from the Servile camp to Dennis, was a startling proof of the demoralization that had set in amongst our troops; but for the present I was inclined rather to devote my attention to the personal aspect of the matter.

Dennis was no doubt right in regarding me as the "officer-friend" alluded to in Mooney's note, but in what way was the Irishman to do me a "good turn"? Once I thought of treachery; yet it was hardly feasible that Mooney would invent an elaborate plot in order to entrap a single filibuster. However, I was very tired, so having eaten my allotted portion of mule-flesh and plantains, I rolled myself in my blanket and went to sleep.

At the appointed time Dennis wakened me, and, accompanied by Trevethik, we set forth on our quest. Although holding the opinion that the writer was acting in good faith, and that no treachery was intended, we nevertheless went fully armed, with our revolvers loaded and our knives ready for use.

At the last outpost Dennis paused. "Now, Phil," he said, "I'll go first, and Mr. Foster and you will follow in Indian file. It's pretty dark, but I guess we can find the way. At the second tree I will leave you, and go on alone. If the business seems genuine, you will hear the note of the whip-poor-will; but if there's likely to be a fuss, you'll hear something mighty different," and he touched the handle of his revolver significantly.

Without making undue noise, we crept forward in the darkness, Dennis leading, until we reached the second tree,

and here Philip and I took up our station. Before long the sound of the welcome signal reached our ears, relieving our anxious fears; thus far our comrade was safe.

For half an hour we waited in the silence and darkness, and then we heard his approaching footsteps. "Let us get back," he said hurriedly, "the story will keep until we are within our own lines."

Trevethik and I were naturally curious to learn what had occurred, and as soon as we reached a place of safety, the Irishman related what had passed between him and the renegade filibuster.

Amongst the Servile leaders, Mooney had found Don Garcia, whose acquaintance he had previously formed in Granada. This half-breed, who from the very first had been bitterly opposed to us, had latterly sunk his patriotism in a private hatred of the deepest intensity toward myself.

Twice, by a strange coincidence, it had fallen to my lot to thwart his pet designs. To me he attributed the ill success of Ponciano Corral's conspiracy, and through my instrumentality the attempted assassination of Colonel Walker had been foiled. In addition, and perhaps this was the most serious of my offences, I had wounded his vanity by the appropriation—I can scarcely call it theft—of his beautiful mare. Don Garcia and his mare, it appeared, had been almost a proverb amongst the allies; and the story of the exchange, spreading as it did in all directions, made him the laughing-stock of the army. His fiery and passionate temperament ill-brooked the merciless

banter to which he was subjected, and he swore a solemn oath that I should pay for my pleasantry with my life.

Hitherto, he had failed to effect his purpose—at Granada his shot had missed—but now, chance appeared to favour his design.

One of my duties was to make a nightly circuit, alternately with Captain O'Neill, of a portion of the camp, to attend to the proper posting of the sentries. Having learned this fact from some of the deserters, Don Garcia resolved to seize a favourable opportunity, and, by means of a sudden attack, carry me off to the Servile intrenchments. The following night had been selected for the enterprise; and if Mooney had not betrayed the plot, there is little doubt but that I should have fallen a victim to the half-breed's cunning.

During the day I paid a visit to the spot selected for the abduction—Garcia's men had received strict orders that I was not to be killed—and made my arrangements.

The place had evidently been chosen with considerable care. For a few yards the ground dipped, forming a hollow through which it was necessary to pass; and, as a matter of fact, I had ridden through it repeatedly. A short distance outside our lines was a large clump of brushwood, which Don Garcia intended to utilize as a hiding-place for his band. Down in the hollow was to be fixed, shortly before my visit, a stout rope, breast-high, stretching from north to south. Coming suddenly upon this, the half-breed calculated that my horse would stumble, I should be thrown, and with a sudden rush his men would

seize and carry me off, before my followers realized what had occurred.

Luckily the night was dark, so that even had the Serviles kept a sharp look-out they would not have noticed the dusky forms of a score of filibusters crawling stealthily over the rugged and uneven ground.

At the usual time, attended by Dennis and two other men, I began my rounds. Trevethik had gone in charge of the ambush. We cantered along gaily, but on nearing the gully I drew rein, and allowed the Irishman to ride in front.

"Be careful, Dennis," I whispered; "do not let your horse roll on you."

"Never fear, Mr. Foster; I'll not give him the laste bit of a chance. Now for it. I hope Phil has the boys well in hand."

Down we went as if we had not a care in the world, when suddenly there was a slight commotion. The leading horse stumbled, Dennis with a cry of simulated pain slipped from the animal's back, and out from the gloom rushed the figure of a man, who cried excitedly in Spanish, "To me, men! he is ours! quick, quick, my braves!"

Almost simultaneously from the north and the south ensued a wild rush, and the air resounded with the noise of oaths and cries and pistol-shots. But the fight was too fierce to last long; in a few minutes nothing could be heard but the groans and shrieks of the wounded and the dying.

"Lights, boys," I cried eagerly; "let us see the results of Don Garcia's ambush."

It was a sickening spectacle. Thirteen of the Serviles lay dead or grievously hurt, and close to the spot where Dennis had slipped from his horse we found Don Garcia in a pool of blood.

He was wounded to the death, but he opened his eyes as I bent over him. "Ah, Señor Foster," he exclaimed faintly, "I thought to have flung a main this time, but the luck is still with you."

"Can you bear to be moved?" I asked gently, and he shook his head.

"No!" he said wearily, "let me lie; I have had my last throw and lost."

Then his mind wandered, and he talked to himself confusedly of many different events. Presently his voice grew so weak that his words were scarcely distinguishable; but suddenly by a great effort he half-raised himself, said quite clearly, "Take care of the mare, Josef," and my implacable foe was dead.

The filibusters escaped from the fight without serious loss, and having seen to the removal of the wounded Serviles, I completed my rounds, and returned to report to the colonel.

"If all the traitors serve us as effectually as Mooney, we shall have but little cause for complaint," was his grim and characteristic comment.

The next few days passed without unusual incident, for we had become accustomed to the daily depletion of our numbers by disease and desertion, against which we were powerless to guard.

About a week after Don Garcia's death, however, the Costa Ricans at San Jorge, who for some time past had continually annoyed us by their waspish attacks, surrounded and cut to pieces a large foraging party. This Walker could not tamely brook, and he determined upon making a supreme effort to dislodge them from their stronghold.

Captain Swingle was left in command of the garrison; and on March 16th, Brigadier-General Henningsen leading the way with all the available guns that could be spared, we marched out four hundred strong.

Gallantly as ever floated the Lone Star flag over our heads; but the men lacked that dash and go, that spirit of enthusiasm, which had previously characterized them. The belief in their own invincibility and in the good-fortune of the "Grey-eyed man of Destiny" had deserted them. Physically, too, they had deteriorated. Hard fighting, with little rest and scanty rations, had told upon even their iron constitutions, and they were no longer capable of those feats of endurance which once they accomplished with ease.

"Well, Colin," exclaimed Colonel Walker, "I fear your prospects of returning to England are not particularly rosy at present."

"Indeed, sir, there has been so much to do lately, I had forgotten all about it. No; the present circumstances certainly do not point to a speedy departure."

"Let us hope to-morrow's work will put a different complexion on matters. But now, ride forward and ask

General Henningsen to moderate his pace a little. I do not wish to overtax the men's strength; they will have need of it all when we reach San Jorge."

"To speak truth, Foster, I am a little impatient to get the business settled," Henningsen said, when I had delivered my message. "I am wondering how Swingle will fare with his handful of men, should the Serviles swoop down upon Rivas during our absence?"

"I trust it will not prove a repetition of the Masaya and Granada incident," I made answer; "though such a catastrophe does not appear unlikely."

"San Jorge will prove a harder nut to crack than Masaya. These Costa Ricans fight well, and they are well-officered."

"Yes; I fancy they draw a large proportion of their officers from Europe."

"From Germany principally, I believe. However, we shall make their acquaintance in the morning."

The day was just breaking when we arrived in sight of San Jorge, and Colonel Walker instantly gave orders for the cannonade to begin. As the old familiar music of the guns rose on the air, the filibusters gave a loud cheer, which was quickly responded to by the enemy, who came swarming out in force from the streets and lanes.

Once again the Costa Ricans justified their reputation and fought valiantly and well. They fell back, certainly, before Henningsen's greeting of grape-shot and canister; but it was only to crowd into the houses, from which they poured forth a murderous fire. Every building became a

fortress, every wall an intrenchment, defended stoutly by a courageous garrison.

Slowly we forced our way, losing men at every step, and about noon we had advanced to within a few yards of the plaza. Here the enemy were drawn up in overwhelming numbers, and every edifice surrounding three sides of the square swarmed with their sharpshooters.

Twice across that deadly space the colonel charged with literally a handful of men; twice he returned unhorsed from the fray; but still he would not admit that the task was too much for our strength. He himself seemed to bear a charmed life, as again and again he emerged scathless from the sea of angry foes into which he had gallantly plunged.

But in spite of the most desperate bravery, the issue was never for a moment in doubt. The Costa Ricans dropped by scores, their dead bodies littered the streets, they lay thick in the little plaza; but the gaps which our men created were instantly filled, and the terrible havoc appeared to make no appreciable difference in their numbers.

How different was it with us! Gazing sadly at our thinned ranks, Don Miguel's odd expression rose to my mind, and I recognized the deep significance of its truth: "A dead Servile is equal to a dead filibuster."

At length our leader, realizing the utter fruitlessness of the struggle, reluctantly issued the order for the troops to retire beyond gunshot. To us it came as a welcome relief, for we had been fighting incessantly for many hours and were worn out with our exertions.

To my great joy, both Trevethik and Brogan were practically unharmed, while I had nothing worse to complain of than a slight sword-thrust in the fleshy part of the left arm, which occasioned me but little inconvenience.

Many were the speculations as to whether the colonel would renew the contest, but towards evening a circumstance occurred which allowed him no option but to return without delay to Rivas. This was the arrival of a friendly Nicaraguan with the information that the Serviles had attacked the town. How they fared he did not remain to see, but posted off with all speed to San Jorge, knowing that the retention of Rivas was of far greater importance to us than dislodging the Costa Ricans from their stronghold.

Instantly the word was given; the men fell into their ranks; Henningsen took up his position in the rear with the guns, and unhindered by the Costa Ricans we moved slowly off in the direction of Rivas. Unluckily, owing to the darkness of the night, the contingent of artillery lost its way, and did not rejoin us until the following morning.

For some distance we marched in silence, occupied chiefly in speculating as to what had happened at Rivas, and little dreaming of the surprise the Serviles had planned for us. About one o'clock we reached a planter's house, which I recollected having previously passed on the journey to San Jorge. It was still too dark to do more than distinguish the outlines of the building, when suddenly the whole place was illuminated by a blaze of musketry. Crash came a volley of bullets right into our midst, and with shrieks of pain five or six of the horsemen fell head-

long. Instantly there arose a savage cry of rage and fury: shots were fired at random; the men, striving to get at their unseen foe, wavered and broke.

Then high above the din rang the colonel's clear voice, "Steady, boys, no panic!" and reining in his horse, heedless of the bullets which were flying around him thick as hail, he fired every barrel of his revolver into the midst of the ambushed Serviles.

It was now that we discovered the absence of artillery. "The guns!" shouted some one in stentorian tones; "bring up the guns, and batter the place about their ears!" But the guns were not to be found.

The incident was a disagreeable and alarming one, and had it not been for Walker's cool bravery, might easily have led to the most serious results; but it afforded us at least one ray of consolation.

"Rivas is still ours, that's one comfort," exclaimed Colonel Watters, when, order having been restored, we rode on in the darkness. "Our friends yonder evidently belong to the troops that attacked Swingle this morning;" and in this opinion we all coincided.

The remainder of the journey was performed without further disaster, and in due time we reached Rivas, much to the gratification of Captain Swingle, who, although he had repulsed the Serviles with great slaughter, was in momentary expectation of another attack. A few hours later, Henningsen arrived safely with the guns, and thus ended our baffled attempt to drive the Costa Ricans from San Jorge.

CHAPTER XXII.

ICHABOD!

FOR the next few days succeeding our re-entry into Rivas we were left in comparative quiet, but the calm was of that kind which precedes the storm. There could be no longer any doubt that all chance of receiving fresh reinforcements was at an end, and it seemed equally hopeless to dream of cutting our way through the enemy's position. One chance alone remained to us, but as the days passed we were precluded from trying even that.

Shortly after the beginning of the war, Walker had captured a Costa Rican steamer, which, furnished with cannons and a sturdy crew, had, under the name of the *Trinidad*, done us good service as a war-ship. At the present time the *Trinidad* was lying at anchor in Virgin Bay, and it was upon her that our hopes of safety now centred. When all other means failed, the colonel resolved to force a passage to the lake, and rapidly embarking his men and ammunition, steam northward, where he could begin the struggle anew.

One day, however, news reached us that two other men-of-war—a British vessel, and one, commanded by Captain

Davis, belonging to the United States navy—had anchored in Virgin Bay. The close proximity of these ships naturally caused us much anxiety, as a broadside from either of them would have sent the *Trinidad* to the bottom. For a brief space the reason for their arrival was a subject of much discussion; but suddenly we were reminded in the most forcible manner of a much graver and more immediate danger.

Hitherto most of our fighting had been of an aggressive nature; now we were to experience the sensation of being attacked in our own quarters. Just a week subsequent to our repulse at San Jorge, the Costa Rican general, who had assumed the chief command of the allied forces, resolved upon making a grand effort to capture the town.

Ah me! the memory of that black day lives with me yet. Of the furious fight that raged I know little, save only of that which occurred at the spot where I myself was stationed.

Afterwards I learned that the allies, basing their plan on the model previously supplied them by Walker, made four separate and distinct attacks, with the object of winning their way to the plaza. All day long the noise of cannon, the shouts of the combatants, the shrieks of the wounded, rang in my ears; a dense smoke overspread the town, rendering the surrounding objects dim and blurred; and under its shelter the enemy several times stole unperceived close to us.

All our preparations had been made long previously, for the colonel foresaw and anticipated the attack.

Debouching upon the plaza from the south was a narrow lane, at the end of which we had thrown up an adobe wall, and fortified it with two six-pounders.

"Lieutenant Foster," said Henningsen early in the day, "take twenty men to support those guns; and remember, the position must be retained at all hazards. If necessary, you must all die at your posts, rather than that the foe should carry the wall."

"Very good, sir," I replied; "we will do all that is possible for men to do."

"I will trust you," he said, with a cheery smile; "here are your men. Ah, Trevethik! you will have warm work presently; but Lieutenant Foster's good luck is proverbial. I warrant you will give a good account of yourselves." Then, addressing the little band, he added, "I have just told your leader how important it is that you should hold this post. Recollect, the enemy must be kept back at all costs."

"Ay, sir," they responded with a cheer; "you may depend upon us."

For nearly an hour we remained inactive, while all around us rose the noise of the fighting, the rattle of musketry, the cheers of the Serviles, the loud hurrah of the filibusters as they gained some temporary advantage, and the sharp cries of the officers rallying their men.

"This is mighty cold work," grumbled one of the artillerymen, as he sat beside his gun. "Dennis, couldn't you go and give some of the Costers an invitation; perhaps they're shy."

Before the laugh which this sally created died away, Dennis exclaimed, "Faith they need little inviting; see, here they come!"

The gunners sprang to their feet ready to fire, as with a loud shout of triumph a dense body of Costa Ricans surged up the narrow entry.

"Steady, men!" shouted the leader of the artillery; "let them come. Now, fire!" And when the smoke cleared away we perceived the front rank had been literally blown to pieces.

Again and again they came on, with the inevitable result, until their dead lay in heaps. Still the survivors did not flinch; and once more, headed by a tall muscular officer in a showy uniform, they returned with unabated ardour to the attack. In vain the guns belched forth fire and flame, vainly the iron missiles swept down the narrow passage; this time nothing could stop them. Another instant, and they were at the muzzles of the guns, unchecked; they swarmed on the wall, their swords flashed in our eyes, and we were engaged in a deadly hand-to-hand struggle.

Desperately we fought, for we were fighting for our honour and our lives; but the Costers seemed animated by a blind, unreasoning fury. For a time the crack of the revolvers was incessant, and when each chamber was emptied we used our knives with terrible effect. But we were outnumbered. Slowly and surely they were pressing us back, when, with a cry of "Remember Santa Rosas," Walker himself, at the head of a few hastily-gathered men, dashed into the fray. With a ringing huzza we renewed

the combat, and the enemy, who had already suffered severely, gave way with reluctance.

"Well done, boys," said the colonel, approvingly. "Lieutenant Foster, you must hold this post. I will endeavour to send you help presently."

"That was a narrow shave," exclaimed Brogan; "the beggars fought like wild cats. Phil, are ye hurt?"

"No!" responded Trevethik, "I'm safe thus far; but look out, they're lining up again."

Reinforced by the men whom Walker had left behind, I viewed the operations of the enemy with a certain amount of composure, when an untoward accident once more rendered our position critical. One of the guns burst with a terrific explosion, killing several men, and leaving us sadly shorn of our strength.

A wild cheer from the Costa Ricans heralded their fresh approach, and revolver in hand we waited to receive them. Again headed by the showily-dressed officer, they clambered up the wall; but this time they barely succeeded in retaining a footing. Twice we bore them back; but each time it was only for a few yards, and they turned again with renewed vigour. The sight of their gigantic leader, who appeared to be of foreign extraction (I learned afterwards he had been a major in the Prussian army), inspired them with fresh courage. Apparently reckless of life, he offered himself freely as a target for my men; but his body seemed invulnerable. Wherever the fight was thickest, there I saw the gleam of his waving sword, and at length in the turmoil of the strife we stood face to face.

My revolver had long since been emptied, but I made a thrust with my sword which he easily parried, and jerked the weapon from my hand. Then, unarmed and defenceless, I watched with a kind of fascination the sweep of his upraised blade, and with a swift rush of thought commended my soul to God.

But my time had not yet come. Even while his sword descended, a dark form interposed between it and me; there were a flash of light, a loud report, and the sound of falling bodies. So quickly did it all take place that I was powerless to interfere; and even after the event, instinct rather than knowledge told me that my gallant Phil had saved my life at the expense of his own.

When the Prussian officer went down there was a momentary lull, and then the struggle recommenced with savage fury. For myself, I was barely conscious of aught save that Trevethik, my chivalrous friend, lay dead or dying somewhere amongst the heap of corpses beneath my feet.

I must have picked up a sword mechanically, for they told me, at the close of the day, that I fought like a man demented; but truly I have a very confused and indistinct remembrance of what actually occurred. Dennis, as usual, was on my left hand, and I doubt not that he warded off many a blow which otherwise must have stretched me lifeless on the spot, for I heeded not danger. My mind was filled with one overmastering desire—I burned to drive these people back, so that I might have leisure to search for my friend's body.

How long the struggle lasted I never inquired, but at

length we were free. Slowly and sullenly the enemy withdrew, leaving the narrow way strewn with their dead. On all sides were heard the signals for retreat; the noise of the firing gradually ceased; and a mighty shout, echoing and re-echoing through the beleaguered town, proclaimed that the day was ours.

Feverishly I threw down my useless weapon, and began the melancholy search. A score of willing arms aided in the work, for the affection existing between the fallen man and myself was no secret amongst the filibusters. Dennis, sad-eyed and sorrowful, directed their operations, and the tones of his voice were low and husky.

At any other time the occupation would have been sickening, but in my eagerness to reach the dear fellow's body I scarcely noticed the ghastly sights, and the moans of anguish from the wounded men fell unheeded on my ears. Corpse after corpse we lifted aside, and each body in which there still lingered a feeble spark of life was carried gently away. So fierce had been the struggle at this particular spot, that our task took up a considerable amount of time.

At last, however, we came to the object of our search. Lying feet to feet were the bodies of the Prussian officer and Trevethik. The former was dead; a bullet had pierced the centre of his brain. As I stooped over Philip, the men drew back with touching tenderness. Displaying an innate delicacy with which one would hardly have credited them, they respected the sanctity of my grief, and momentarily averted their gaze.

So still and motionless he lay that I feared the worst. His eyes were unclosed, but in them was no sight; his teeth were firmly clenched; and I could detect no sign of breathing through the half-open lips. The rough woollen shirt that he wore was open at the chest, disclosing a long ragged wound, from which a quantity of blood had drained. I placed my hand over his heart; there was no perceptible movement, nor could I hear any sound. Slowly, very slowly, I raised myself and turned toward the bystanders with a despairing gesture.

"O Mr. Foster, he isn't dead! don't say my dear old Phil is dead," wailed Dennis, his face streaming with unchecked tears.

I dared not trust myself to speak, my grief was too intense, but silently I motioned them to lay the prostrate body upon the stretcher which they had hastily improvised. The rough, scarred faces were illumined by a womanish pity, as the grim warriors lifted their sad burden and laid it reverently on its resting-place. Then evenly, and with the greatest care, so as not to jolt the sufferer, the mournful procession took its way; and sad as my heart was, it afforded me a certain faint consolation to perceive how well-beloved Trevethik had been by his comrades.

Near the hospital we were met by the colonel and his principal officers. Walker's keen glance traversed the little group until it rested on my face. "Ah, lieutenant!" he exclaimed, with a perceptible movement of relief, "you are unhurt. I feared you had fallen." Then catching sight of the Irishman's look of misery, he added quickly,

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I dared not trust myself to speak (p. 368)

"Not Trevethik, surely? There was not a braver soldier in the army." And with a swift motion he bared his head, an example instantly followed by the others.

"He saved my life," I gasped, with a choking sob; "and if not dead, I fear he is mortally wounded."

Bending over the ambulance, Walker laid his hand close to the gaping wound. "Take him to my quarters," he said; "I will send Dr. Sparrow over, and follow myself. He still lives. He must not die for want of attention.—You have left a guard at your post?"

"Yes, sir; none of my command save these have moved. Lieutenant Walter is in charge."

"Very good.—Take him carefully, men—nothing can save him should the wound bleed afresh—but there is little need to caution you, I perceive."

The colonel spoke advisedly; nothing could exceed the tenderness which the men showed toward their stricken comrade.

Until the doctor's arrival we could only wait hopelessly, and bear the pain of our suspense. His first order was to have the apartment cleared; but, unable to resist the appeals which Dennis and I offered, he somewhat ungraciously permitted us to remain.

Before the examination concluded, Walker entered, and took a seat by me. "Cheer up, Colin," he whispered; "while there is life, there is hope, remember."

I shook my head sorrowfully. From the moment he fell I had anticipated the worst. In my imagination my old friend was doomed, and the doctor's words confirmed my fears.

"He is not dead," he announced, speaking slowly; "but the wound is a mortal one; he cannot recover."

Dennis choked the sob in his throat, and gazed at me silently. Trevethik and he had passed through so many dangers together, had defied the grim king so often and so successfully, that he could not at once realize the significance of the doctor's verdict. It was not the first time he had witnessed his old comrade stretched before him apparently lifeless, and hitherto he had always recovered. In spite of the surgeon's ominous words, I fancy he still clung to a lingering hope that even now his stanch and true companion would be left to him.

But to me, Dr. Sparrow's brief announcement sounded like a death-knell. I had no hope. I accepted the sentence, as if it had been a decree of fate. But one desire was now left to me—that the dying man should recover consciousness. I put the question timidly, afraid of the answer.

On this point, however, the surgeon was more hopeful. "Yes," he said, reassuringly, "the chances are all in its favour. One cannot pretend to infallibility, of course; but the probability is he will recognize you, when the end draws near."

The boon was a slight one, but it was all for which I dared to hope.

"How long has he to live?" asked the colonel; and at the reply, "A few days," Dennis broke down utterly.

"Lieutenant Foster can remain here, I presume?"

"Oh yes; nothing can affect the dying man for good or

ill. He will be delirious the greater portion of his time, and will need cooling drinks. I will look in again later; but I warn you the case is hopeless."

"Let me stay too, sir," sobbed Dennis; "I could not bear to leave him now." And his request was granted.

All through the night we sat and watched, speaking only at long intervals and in whispers, fearful of disturbing our friend's repose. Now and again one or the other would bend over the dying man, afraid lest his spirit should pass away and we should not know the moment of his death.

In the morning Dennis suggested that I should endeavour to obtain an hour's sleep, promising to waken me at the faintest sign of a change. Rather reluctantly, I consented. But my eyes were heavy; and as I leaned back, even the magnitude of my grief could not keep me from sleeping. At the end of two hours Dennis roused me, and I took my place at the bedside, where Trevethik lay still unconscious, but exhibiting a slight restlessness, which increased with the passing hours.

Toward night he began to talk, but his speech was rambling and incoherent. His mind, I noticed, had travelled back over the march of many years, and he was dwelling again amidst the scenes of his youth. Once he murmured the name "mother," and over his gaunt features stole a sweet smile—the smile of innocent happiness. Then he spoke of "Mary," and "wife," and "little Philip," until by degrees I learned his simple history.

"All dead," whispered Dennis, "many years since. Mary

was his wife. She died when the boy was two years old; and when the child followed its mother, Philip broke up his home and crossed the water."

I gazed with renewed interest at the wounded man. What a world of pathos lay hidden in his simple story, and how nobly had he borne himself withal! What days and nights of misery he must have suffered, and yet with never a word of complaint! His wise counsels, his kindly acts, his unselfish generosity, sprang anew into life. With his few broken sentences for a guide, my mind projected itself into that peaceful Cornish home. I saw Philip, the devoted son, the loving husband, the proud and happy father. I saw, too, the successive visits of the angel of death, tearing from him one by one those whom he loved so fondly, until with aching heart he was left alone.

My reverie terminated abruptly; he was talking loudly. The shores of merry England had faded from his ken; he was engulfed in the horrors of the Sonora campaign, and the Irishman's name fell frequently from his lips. Dennis covered his face, but he could not conceal the tears which trickled between his fingers. "Poor old Phil! poor old Phil!" he moaned, rocking his body to and fro unceasingly.

Presently the sick man's thoughts were diverted to the expedition into Nicaragua, and he addressed Dennis and myself alternately. "Poor lad," he said once; "lift him gently, Dennis. I would willingly have given my life for him;" and I knew he was fighting over again our first battle at Rivas.

It was on the morning of the third day that his eyes

shone with the light of reason. He glanced from one to the other with an expression of grateful affection. "Mr. Foster! Dennis!" he said feebly; "ah, as ever, true to the end!"

"Don't talk of the end, Phil; we will have you up and well before long," said the Irishman eagerly.

"No, old comrade, it is useless to deceive ourselves. Phil Trevethik has fought his last fight.—Did we beat them that day, Mr. Foster?"

My tears were falling fast, but pressing his hand affectionately I answered, "Yes."

"And you escaped unhurt?"

"O my dear friend," I cried impulsively, "have you forgotten that you gave your life to save mine? Had it not been for your heroic deed, Colin Foster must have died in that terrible fight. To save me, Phil, you sacrificed yourself."

"Ah!" he made answer with a cheerful smile, "it is better so. I am worn and wearied with the struggle. Life has had but little pleasure for me during many years, and I am not sorry to part with it. Still," with a sigh, "I would that I could have seen you safely through this business. Colin, my boy," earnestly, "you know the love I bear toward you; let it be my excuse for the words I am about to utter. You are young, and in all probability have many years before you. Make a good use of them. Do your duty, my boy; let that be your watchword. Keep it ever before you, and you cannot go wrong. Let others prostrate their honour to self-interest and ambition;

do you what is right. Be honest and brave and truthful, loyal to your comrades, fearless in right-doing. Make virtue your aim, so that at the last you may enter the presence of your God with a quiet conscience. Bid the colonel farewell for me.—Dennis, old comrade, it grows dark. Let me grasp your hand; its touch will give me strength."

For a few seconds he lay quite still; then his lips parted, a happy smile hovered round them, and murmuring, "Little Philip," he was at rest.

Thus passed away the truest, noblest, and best man I have ever known—one of the finest of nature's gentlemen.

We buried him the same evening in a lonely, deserted spot; and after the long procession dispersed, Dennis and I lingered for a while near the simple grave.

"He was a good man, Mr. Foster," said the dead man's comrade; "brave as a lion, yet no woman could have been more tender-hearted." And I heartily endorsed the honest fellow's words.

During these last days, we two had paid little attention to aught outside our immediate grief; but now I forced myself to take an interest in what was going on. Although soundly beaten on that fatal day on which poor Trevethik fell, the allies betrayed no intention of relaxing their efforts. On the contrary, they not only strengthened their position, but crept nearer and nearer to the doomed town.

At this time our sufferings and privations were pitiable. Every day death and desertion sensibly decreased our numbers, rendering it imperative that those who remained

should toil day and night in order to cope with the vigilance of the enemy. For weeks, too, our rations had been meagre in quantity and of the most wretched description. We were living over again the horrors a few of us had experienced in Granada. Horse-flesh, mule-flesh, and plantains constituted the most important and nearly the sole items in our bill of fare; and no opportunity offered of adding a fresh supply to the stock. As at Granada, so here—the lack of provisions appeared fated to produce our downfall.

For myself, since Trevethik's death I had ceased to feel much interest in the situation. With the loss of my trusty friend, the airy castles which I built on the strength of Walker's announcement fell to pieces. That an appalling catastrophe was at hand, everything clearly showed; but my sole desire was that it should come speedily.

Before long my wish appeared likely to be gratified. About ten days after Trevethik's death, the allies once more moved up in overwhelming force and endeavoured to carry the town by assault. Again and again, under cover of their heavy guns, they flung themselves upon us, and each time they were driven back with frightful slaughter. All day long the battle raged, and when night put an end to the carnage we had just managed to maintain our position.

The morning light revealed the fact that the enemy had withdrawn to his original intrenchments, and to that extent we were enabled to congratulate ourselves upon the result of the previous day's struggle. Still it was evident we had nearly reached the end of our resources; even another

victory, such as we had just gained, would complete our ruin.

At this juncture Walker summoned a council of officers to consider a proposal which he had received from Commander Davis of the United States navy. That officer offered to give a safe convoy to our women and children to San Juan, and it was unanimously resolved to take advantage of the proposition.

Then the colonel, in a few brief sentences, proceeded to outline the scheme which he intended to adopt with regard to the troops.

"Gentlemen," he said, "it is futile to deny the fact that we can no longer retain our position at Rivas. One course, and one only, remains open; it is for you to decide if we shall take advantage of it. With the removal of the women and children, the chief difficulty is cleared from our path. In Virgin Bay lies the *Trinidad*, with steam up, ready at any moment to slip her moorings. Once on her decks, our passage to the north of the country is only a question of a few hours. There we shall find not enemies but friends. The Leonese will rise to aid us, and by the time the allies reach Leon, the country will be in revolt. To cut our way to the lake, will be a desperate undertaking; but when have the filibusters quailed before danger?"

A ringing cheer greeted this simple speech; and Brigadier-General Henningsen exclaimed quietly, "Wherever the Lone Star waves, I for one will follow."

"And I! and I!" shouted a score more, and the meeting dissolved amidst a scene of indescribable enthusiasm.

The rest of the officers walked off in little knots of twos and threes, but I remained behind to write the letter which the colonel was about to forward to Commander Davis.

"Now, Colin," he said, "your opportunity has arrived! It is necessary to send an officer with the women; you shall have the post."

This time I did not hesitate in the least. "Thank you, sir," I responded firmly; "but I have no desire to go. As long as your flag flies, I remain with you."

"So be it," he replied, after a moment's silence. "I will not press you. Now to answer this man's letter; his messenger waits."

The parting between husbands and wives, between parents and children, was a most touching sight. Many of the women begged with tears in their eyes that they might be allowed to stay; but this, of course, was impossible—the work before us was of too stern a nature. At length the final convoy was got safely away, and we were free to push on with the preparations for that which would probably prove the most daring incident of the whole campaign.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MERRY ENGLAND.

ON my way to the colonel's the next morning, I overtook a group of officers hurrying in the same direction. They were conversing eagerly, though in low tones, and from their expressions and excited gestures, only half-suppressed, it was clear that something of moment had happened.

"Whence this commotion?" I asked Meadows. "Have the allies retreated during the night?"

He shook his head energetically. "No; we have heard nothing definitely, but there is a wild rumour flying through the place that the game is up."

"Surely you do not mean the men will refuse to follow where we lead?"

"No, the men will fight to the end; but report affirms the matter has been taken out of our hands. Mind, I cannot vouch for the truth of the information, but it is said Commander Davis has intimated to Walker his intention of seizing the *Trinidad*."

This was indeed news of a startling character. Should it prove correct, the sole chance of freeing ourselves from the toils would be gone.

For the first time during the campaign, the colonel's features bore traces of angry excitement. His eyes flashed, and he spoke in harsh, stern tones. In his hand he held a letter from the captain of the United States war-ship, stating in emphatic and unequivocal language his resolve to seize the *Trinidad*, or in the alternative to blow her up.

A deep silence fell upon us as our leader finished reading the communication—a silence followed by sundry exclamations of passionate anger. The same question rose to the lips of all, By whose authority did this man take upon himself the right to dictate terms to the President of Nicaragua? For, however low his fortunes had fallen, there could be no question as to the legality of his title. In a free and open election the people of Nicaragua had, by an overwhelming majority, called him to the highest office in their country. From the people his power had been derived; to them, and to them alone, should it be resigned.

All discussion on this point was, however, futile. "We must accept the situation, gentlemen," the colonel said; "in this instance, 'might is right.' Let us look the matter fairly in the face. We have lost the *Trinidad*, and with that loss the plan upon which we agreed has fallen through. The enemy has constructed a bridge for our retreat; shall we make use of it? Put briefly, this is the proposition brought forward for our acceptance or rejection. Captain Davis guarantees us a safe passage to the lake, and an immediate transport to the United States. The lives of our native allies are to be held sacred, and their property is not to be confiscated. For these things the American com-

mander holds himself personally responsible. Brigadier, what is your opinion?"

Henningsen stood up, and looking steadily at his comrades, said: "There cannot be much doubt as to our course, unless we choose to remain and die here. We do not number three hundred men all told, and our provisions, such as they are, will not last longer than to-morrow night. At a terrible expenditure of life we can cut a way through the enemy—but what then? We shall simply have exchanged the shelter of our defences for the open country, and in consequence be the more easily annihilated. Without a ship, we can do nothing."

He finished speaking amidst a low murmur of approval, and Colonel Watters, who had so gallantly fought his way into Granada, rose to his feet.

"The brigadier is right," he began briskly; "the issue is an exceedingly narrow one. Stated boldly and stripped of unnecessary words, the question is this, Shall we choose life or death? The commander offers us an honourable capitulation. We can either accept it, or die together here at Rivas under the old flag; there is no third way."

"Let us stay and fight it out," suggested Meadows, a hot-headed and impetuous youth; "shall the Lone Star go down before a pack of half-breeds?"

Then ensued an animated discussion, in which I bore no part. It really seemed immaterial to me in what way the matter ended; but as the conversation proceeded, it became apparent that a majority of the disputants were in favour of accepting the proffered terms.

Walker had now recovered his equanimity, his features once more wore their habitual air of impassive calm, and when the decision to capitulate was arrived at he betrayed no emotion. We, however, who had fought with him, trusted and loved him, were not deceived by his assumed indifference. We knew that behind the outwardly calm breast beat a storm-tossed heart.

Outside fluttered proudly the flag of the Lone Star. What desperate scenes had it not looked down upon! How often it had cheered us to victory! How many valiant men had freely shed their life's blood beneath its torn folds! After all, there is something inexpressibly dear to a soldier in that bit of coloured bunting which flaunts above his head, and I gazed sadly at the symbol so soon to be furled.

Looking back now, calmly and dispassionately across the years, I can perceive clearly the wisdom of my brother-officers' decision; but at that moment I almost wished they had ruled otherwise.

Regrets, however, were vain; the deed was done, the treaty signed, our campaign was at an end.

In the dusk of the evening I walked down to Trevethik's last resting-place, and found Dennis gazing with an abstracted air at the melancholy spot. His cheeks were wet with tears, and he looked at me sadly. "Will they let him lie in peace?" he asked, and I shook my head doubtfully.

"We will hope so," I replied; "but even if they outrage his remains, it will matter little to poor Phil now."

We stood for a space silently contemplating the bit of

ground which concealed the body of our dead friend from view. Presently I said, "Dennis, I am going to England; will you accompany me? I am about to take possession of a little property which will be sufficient to keep both you and me in comfort. The war is over; you can do no more good here; come and settle down with me."

The Irishman looked into my face, and his eyes glistened; but he said frankly, "A thousand thanks, Mr. Foster, but I cannot accept your offer just yet. While the colonel requires my services, I cannot desert him; and it will not be long before he has need of me. You see, you do not quite understand him as I do. He is beaten, badly beaten for the moment, but he has no idea of yielding. While he has breath in his body he will return again and again to the struggle; and until the Lone Star flag is furled for ever, Dennis Brogan will be found following its fortunes.

"You are not offended with me," he said, finding I did not speak; and with a warm pressure of his hand, I could only praise his loyal-hearted devotion to his fallen chief.

Some time longer we lingered at the grave-side of our common friend, till the increasing darkness warned us it was time to retire, and with sorrowful hearts we tore ourselves away.

It was our last night at Rivas, and a part of it I spent in writing a letter to Don Miguel. In it I explained the necessity for my immediate return to England; and after narrating the incident of Trevethik's death, concluded with a promise to pay him a visit as soon as my affairs should be satisfactorily settled. This missive I entrusted to the

care of one of our native allies, who offered to convey it to Don Miguel; and I may state here that in due time it safely reached its destination.

Toward the morning, General Henningsen began the work of destroying the cannons and all the surplus ammunition, in order that nothing of any value should fall into the hands of the enemy. Finally it was all completed—the guns broken in pieces, the cartridges and the powder exploded, the caps destroyed—and heavy-hearted, but with proud demeanour, we marched out from the famine-stricken town.

At Virgin Bay we bade adieu to our men, who were to be conveyed home by another route; and to the faithful Leonese, who, of course, remained behind. Then we climbed the sides of the *St. Mary*, and some weeks later reached New York.

At that place Colonel Walker received an enthusiastic reception. Broadway was decked with gaily-coloured flags, gorgeous banners fluttered lazily from the roofs of the buildings, and the people flocked in thousands to cheer themselves hoarse in honour of the heroic filibuster.

Meantime, I had engaged a berth in the steamship *Devonian;* and the evening before the date fixed for her departure, I went to bid my old commander farewell.

"Good-bye, Colin," he said fervently; "I shall never forget you. We have passed through many dangers together, and I thank God you have survived them. May you have many years before you of a peaceful and happy life."

"And you, sir," I responded brokenly; "have you not done with strife and bloodshed? May I not echo your sentiments?"

He smiled rather bitterly. "Ah, Colin," he said, unconsciously striking a prophetic note, "what a grand thing it is that the future should be veiled from our eyes! For us weak mortals, what a beneficent arrangement that we know not what a day or an hour may bring forth!"

Once more we clasped warmly each the hand of the other, and I took my leave, never to look upon his face again. The Irishman's anticipations were fulfilled. In a few months the Lone Star flag was again unfurled, attracting a band of daring and desperate men, amongst whom my old friend Dennis figured conspicuously. The expedition, however, came to an untimely end. Walker was taken prisoner, tried by court-martial, and summarily shot. Faithful to the end, Dennis gazed at the sad tragedy from behind his prison bars, eager, yet powerless, to interfere.

At the time of which I write, these events were hidden in the obscurity of the future; but I have sometimes fancied that even then a presentiment of his coming fate had projected its shadow across the mind of the daring filibuster.

That same night on which I left him I slept on board the *Devonian*, and with the morning's dawn we steamed slowly out from the crowded harbour.

Homeward bound! though, alas, as yet my home was of the most shadowy description. My fellow-passengers talked amongst themselves of the delights that awaited

them, and their eyes shone with happiness as they pictured the speedy meeting with those whom they loved.

How gladly would I have given every penny I possessed, if he who had died for me could have paced the deck at my side! I longed to see the genial smile on his kindly features, to listen to his speech, to feel the grasp of his strong hand; but, alas! honest Phil Trevethik had passed out of my life. Moody and taciturn, I kept apart from the joyous throng, communing with my own sad thoughts.

The voyage terminated without any untoward incident, and once in the metropolis I hastened to interview the lawyers who had advertised for "James Foster, or his son Colin."

It is not necessary to weary you with a recital of the tedious formalities, the long periods of waiting, the vexatious delays, before the law recognized the validity of my claim; but at length it was satisfactorily established that I was Colin Foster, son of the late James Foster. As such, I was the legal heir of my father's uncle, who had recently died at an advanced age, leaving behind him a snug little property.

"Allow me to congratulate you," said the lawyer, when the business was finally concluded. "You are now the owner of a pretty house and grounds in Devonshire, and of invested money of the annual value of eight hundred pounds. I trust you may live long to enjoy your good fortune."

On the following day I went down to my new home, which had been left in the charge of a trusty woman, the

housekeeper of the former owner. It was indeed a beautiful spot, and I felt a strange joy in the knowledge that it belonged to me.

For the first few weeks, too, I had a considerable amount of business to transact, which occupied my time and prevented me from dwelling upon my loneliness.

One morning the postman brought me a foreign letter. It was from Don Miguel, in answer to one I had written shortly after my safe arrival in England. I read it with interest, and my heart warmed with pleasure at the assurance that my one-time friend had not forgotten me. He narrated the story of Walker's fresh attempt and its tragic end, and concluded with a pressing invitation to come and see them directly affairs would allow of my absence from England.

I finished my breakfast hastily, packed a few things, and the same afternoon was in London, much to the amazement of the worthy Mr. Phillips, who was at the moment of my unexpected appearance on the point of quitting his office. However, he listened attentively to my plans, took down the directions concerning Dennis in case the Irishman should call before my return, and promised faithfully to look after my interests.

"You need have no care," he remarked. "Your income is as safe as the Bank of England—dividends regularly paid, and no fear of a fraction of the capital being lost. I hope you may have a pleasant journey; by-and-by, perhaps, you will be better able to appreciate the advantages of old England."

I smiled rather gloomily at the allusion to my restlessness. Happy old man! he had wife and children, and troops of friends, while I— Ah, well! that dreary time has long since ended.

A strange longing had seized upon me to visit the old familiar spots, and I resolved to cross the continent to San Francisco. The time was the eve of the great struggle which was to plunge the United States into such nameless horrors. Everywhere men were hurrying to join the colours; in every town I heard talk of forthcoming battles and brilliant victories; I saw the bright new banners, as yet untouched by shot or shell; and as I saw and heard, my heart grew sad.

In New York I met Henningsen, who had accepted a commission in the Southern army.

"Do you fight on our side?" he asked. "You will find most of your old comrades with you."

"No," I replied; "I have had enough of fighting. I am on my way to Nicaragua, to revisit some old friends."

"Ah! you had a rough apprenticeship, Colin; but you came through it with credit. You have heard about poor Walker!" And so, with a sigh for our old leader, we parted.

From San Francisco I took steamer to Realejo, and thence proceeded to Leon. Here indeed I was in the midst of friends hospitable and warm-hearted, and here for many months I remained.

Ah, that was a happy period of my life! Sometimes Inez sang to us in her clear sweet voice; sometimes we

sat, Luis, Miguel, and I, fighting our battles over again, recounting our adventures, and conversing of those we had loved and lost.

The country was fairly quiet now; and one day, accompanied by Miguel, I made the journey to Rivas, where, to my lively satisfaction, I found Philip's grave untouched. With the permission of the governor, we placed an iron railing around it; and over the head of the grave we hung a beautiful ivory cross, a present from Inez.

"He was a good man," said the gentle girl, in giving it to me, "and I shall like to know he is sleeping beneath the shadow of my little crucifix."

At length the time came for us to part. Once again, however, I revisited Nicaragua, and on this occasion Inez consented to be my wife and return with me to England.

* * * * *

Many years have passed since the foregoing events happened, and the cycle of time has brought its round of changes. The poor stripling who shivered in the cold of the San Francisco streets is now a middle-aged man, who thanks God every day for the blessings showered upon him.

My task is done, but ere I lay down my pen with a sigh of regret at the completion of my labours, let me show you one picture more.

It is a glorious afternoon in June. The blue sky is flecked with delicate flakes of feathery white clouds; the earth is bathed in sunlight; a soft, cool wind tempers the heat; the sweet fragrance of the beautiful English flowers

permeates the air; the happy birds carol joyously amidst the leafy branches,—everything speaks of joy and sweet content.

There, in the background, stands a pretty house, with the long French windows open to the refreshing breeze. Two people are seated in the room; they are looking into the garden. The tall big man, with a pen in his hand and a heap of papers at his side, is Colin Foster. Do you recognize the lady with the sweet, kindly smiling eyes? That is Inez.

Now let your gaze wander to the big bushy tree at the end of the garden. Under its shade you will perceive an old man, white-haired and slightly bowed, but with a merry twinkle, which time has not been able to efface, in his eyes. Close by stands a tall sturdy youngster of eight, who is looking up into his companion's face with an expression of absorbing interest.

For the hundredth time he is hearing the account of the terrible fighting in that far-off land where his father followed the fortunes of the Lone Star flag. He knows it all by heart, but he is never tired of listening; and the old man never grows weary of repeating the familiar story.

Watch them closely. Dennis has made a half pause; there seems to be something in his throat.

Draw nearer and listen; you will be able to hear the close of the boy's remark:—

"Ah, I know; Philip Trevethik. That is my name too —Philip Trevethik Foster. Papa says he was a good

man; but you know, Dennis, I think you are a good man as well. Now let us go in."

At the brow of the little hill to the right you will see a quaint old-fashioned village church; and should you care to step inside, you cannot fail to notice a marble tablet with the following inscription:—

Sacred to the Memory
OF
PHILIP TREVETHIK,
KILLED AT RIVAS, 1857.

"*He laid down his life for his friend.*"

THE END.

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